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THE HOUSE ON THE MOOR.

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BY

THE AUTHOR OF

"MARGARET MAITLAND," "ADAM GRAEME,"

"THE LAIRD OF NORLAW,"

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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THE HOUSE ON THE MOOR.

CHAPTER I.

It was still early, when Susan, somewhat flushed by her rapid walk, and somewhat tired to the boot—for, elastic and strong, and accustomed to exercise as she was, six miles of solitary road, with a bundle to carry, not to say the burden of her desolate circumstances, and the natural timidity which, after a while, replaced her flush of indignant vehemence, was rather an exhausting morning promenade for a girl of nineteen—arrived at Tillington. And, in spite of Peggy's injunctions and her own sense of necessity, it was only with lingering steps, and a painful reluctance,

that she at last summoned courage sufficient to present herself at John Gilsland's open door. Once there, however, matters became easy enough, smoothed by Mrs. Gilsland's eager and ready welcome, and by an incident of which Susan had not thought.

"Eyeh, miss! but he's gone no moor nor half an hour since," cried Mrs. Gilsland. "Bless us awl! to have a young lady like you come as far, and o'er late, when awl's done! But he was in grit haste, was Mr. Horry. Come into the fire, and rest yoursel', for the like of them long walks at this hour in the morning, they're no for leddy-birds like you. You'll have heard from the Cornel, miss? And how is he?—the dear gentleman! But you're not agoing to stand there, with that white face. Dear heart, sit down, and I'll get a cup of tea in a twinkling. She's clean done with tiredness, and the disappointment. John! if ye had the spirit of a mouse, ye'd goo after Mr. Horry, and bring him back to satisfy miss—there, do ye hear?"

"No, Mrs. Gilsland," said Susan, eagerly; "but, please, if John will get the gig, and

drive me to the railroad, and perhaps we might overtake my brother. I'm—I'm—I'm —going to see my uncle to Scotland; and Horace would — might, perhaps — see me away."

"But, dear miss, your boxes?" cried Mrs. Gilsland, gazing at the young pedestrian with astonishment, and throwing her wonder into the first tangible thing that occurred to her, as she took the bundle out of Susan's hand.

"They are to come after me," said Susan, with a blush of shame; "but we had better make haste, and overtake Horace. He does not know I am going; but I think—thought—he would, perhaps, go with me to the railroad," added Susan, availing herself of that unexpected assistance, to cover her strange departure alone from Marchmain, yet blushing at the falsehood of the inference. "Oh, will you please to tell John? I have had breakfast. I could not take any tea, thank you, Mrs. Gilsland, but I want so much to overtake my brother."

This was so reasonable and comprehensible,

that the good woman left her guest immediately, to startle her husband into unusual speed, and urge him on to the harnessing of the horse, and preparation of the gig, with such wonderful expedition, that John, who, contrary to his usual habits, had no time whatever to think about it, was perfectly flushed with the exertion, and scarcely knew what he was doing. Susan, grateful to be left unquestioned, sat alone in the meantime in the little parlour, feeling half glad, and half guilty, in the strange relief afforded her by Horace's recent presence here, and the excuse it served to give for her own appearance. It saved her entirely from the halting and timid explanation of a sudden visit to her uncle, and there being nobody at Marchmain who could be spared to accompany her, with which she had been trying to fortify herself, as she approached Tillington; and the momentary rest and quietness was a relief to her tired and excited frame. Then the very room recalled to poor Susan recollections which warmed and strengthened her heart. Uncle Edward!—the only person in the world, save

Peggy, who had ever looked with tender, indulgent eyes of affection upon her youth; and it was to him and his house she was going! She sat there motionless, in the dingy little inn parlour, too much fatigued and strained in mind even to unclasp her hands, but unconsciously recovering her courage, and feeling the light and flicker of a happiness to come about her heart.

This sensation of comfort increased when Susan was fairly seated in John Gilsland's gig, most carefully wrapped about with shawls and mantles, and began to feel the exhilaration of that rapid passage through the free air and over the open country. The youth in her veins rose like mercury in spite of herself, and she was not sure that she was so very glad in her heart as she ought to have been when John Gilsland assured her of her certainty of overtaking Horace. She was not a very attentive listener to honest John's talk, profuse and digressive as that was. She made gentle answers, for it was not in Susan's nature to show even unintentional rudeness to anybody; but with so much to

think about, and possessed by the thrill of novel excitement which their first necessity of acting for themselves gives to very young people, she made but a very indifferent listener in reality. Then her heart kept beating over the thought of this approaching interview with her brother, and leaped to her mouth, as people say, when any distant figure became visible on the road. She did not know the road, nor whether her conductor was taking her direct the nearest way to the railway. They *were* making progress on this earliest stage of her long journey; and it was still morning, and all the long spring day was before her; that was almost enough for Susan in her present state of mind.

She was roused at length, and startled into an instant access of renewed excitement and anxiety by a shout from John Gilsland.

"Holla, Mr. Horry! Holla, lad! hey! hear ye! Maister Horry! here's me and your sister fleeing after you this six or seven miles. Mr. Horry, I'm saying—holla!"

Horace was before them, at some little distance. He stopped when the shouting

reached his ear, and turned to look back. As they came up to him, Susan had full leisure to observe the changes which this year had wrought upon her brother's appearance, and a little sensation of affectionate pride gladdened her at the sight. But she was anxious, a thousand times more anxious, to make sure that he should speak to her with ordinary kindness, and without exposing rudely the nature of her sudden journey, which he was sure to guess, than she was to think how Uncle Edward would receive her when she went to throw herself penniless upon his charity; and felt herself approaching him close and fast with a degree of trepidation strange to see between two persons so nearly the same age, and so closely allied. He for his part stared at her with utter amazement as the gig approached closer. "Susan! what on earth has brought you here?" he exclaimed, with an astonishment which was by no means free of anger. Susan trembled and faltered in her answer, as if her father himself had asked the question.

"Oh, Horace! to ask you to go to the

railway with me," she said, stooping closer towards him, and pressing the hand which he slowly extended towards her, significantly and closely, to make him understand that she had more to say: "I am going to Uncle Edward —will you come and see me away?'

He looked at her with a strange, half-envious, half-contemptuous smile. "So, he lets you go!" he exclaimed; "he has grown amiable all at once, it would appear."

"Oh, Horace, hush!" cried Susan, stooping closer, with a sudden rush of tears to her eyes. "I will tell you all whenever we stop. Oh, Horace," she added, in an inexpressible yearning for sympathy, and sinking her voice to a whisper, "don't look so unkind and cold; he has sent me away!"

"The mare's fresh and spankey," said John Gilsland; "she's enough to manage without any whispering in her lug. Jump up behind, Mr. Horry, and tawlk as we goo. It'll be straight to the railroad now?"

"Have you not been going straight to the railroad?" asked Susan, in surprise.

"Straight! I trust you thought me of

sufficient importance to bring you five miles out of your way," said Horace, sharply, "and lose your train too, most likely. Why didn't you drive as she ordered you, Gilsland? What good can I do her? Look sharp now, then, can't you? Well, Susan, what's this sudden journey about?"

"Oh, Horace! can't you guess?" said Susan, looking at him wistfully. "But, hush! —never mind," she added, as she encountered his angry stare of inquiry. "Oh, hush! I'll tell you everything when we get there!"

And from that moment the most eager wish to get there moved poor Susan. His angry dissatisfaction at being stopped; his cold salutation; his apparent resentment at the idea that he could know anything about her journey or its cause; the tone in which he repelled her confidential whispers, and repeated aloud what she had said to him with all the little pantomimic exhortations to secrecy which were possible to her; brought a renewed chill upon her heart. They went along at a great pace, the mare, however, being the only individual of the party who showed the least ex-

hilaration or pleasure on the road. Would that John Gilsland had been less considerate of the sister's desire to overtake her brother! Would that he had gone the straight road, and made less demonstration of his kindly intentions! After all, the straight road is the best; but to hear Horace Scarsdale angrily insisting upon that plain fact, and upon the folly of making so long a *detour* to overtake him, was not calculated to raise anybody's spirits, or to make the drive more agreeable. John Gilsland's talk, which Susan had only half listened to, was much better than the sharp, dropping conversation which now went on at intervals; and Susan bought at a sufficiently hard price her momentary ease and relief.

"Where are you going, Horace?" she asked, with hesitation—"away from Kenlisle, Peggy said——"

"I am going to Harliflax," he said, shortly. "I have got a better appointment there. I have managed to make my own way so far, you can tell my uncle—without being obliged to any one," he added, with a sneer.

"And will you write sometimes, please, Horace?" said Susan. "There are only two of us in the world; and tell me, where shall I write to you?"

He laughed, as if this was an extremely unimportant matter. "I shall be with Mr. Stenhouse," he said—"Julius Stenhouse, Esq. I daresay your letters will find me, with his name."

"Stenhouse, said ye? Eyeh, Mr. Horry, will that be the Stenhouse that was i' Kenlisle, in ould Pouncet's office?" asked John Gilsland, suddenly looking round.

"And if it should be, what then?" asked Horace, insolently.

"Oh, little matter to me," said honest John. "He's a great scoondrel, that's awl—and married that bit silly widow, poor thing!—her as didn't know when she was well off, and had good friends; though the Squire would have done for her, as I have reason to know, like a sister of his own."

"What widow?" demanded Horace.

"It's no concern of mine," said John Gilsland, touching the mare with his whip for a

grand final dash up to the railway station. "She wasn't my widow, I reckon, nor belonging to me. Her first man was a sodger captain, another chance kind o' person, like his son, one Mr. Roger that was. What the deevil has a woman to do with a new husband, that has house and hyame o'er her head, and a likely son? Serve her right, as I aye said, and will say. They're away out of this country—but he's a great scoondrel, as I tell ye, wherever he may be."

In spite of himself Horace started, and was shocked, as well as astonished, for the moment by this information. While Susan gazed at the railway, glad, and yet trembling to reach it, with thoughts of launching forth by herself, without even those familiar faces near which she knew well, though they smiled little upon her, Horace was busy with this strange bit of news. It was somewhat astounding even to him to think that the man who had betrayed the interests and appropriated the estate of the son, should be the husband of his mother. Running on with this contemplation, and biting his thumb, as was his custom

when he addressed himself to the task of arranging something new among his stores, and finding out where it fitted best, his eye suddenly caught in the group before the railway-station the stooping and decrepid figure of his old pitman, carefully dressed in his "Sabbath clothes." Horace sprang from the gig, though it was still in rapid motion, with an impulse of alarm, and hurried up to his strange acquaintance. The mare drew up immediately after, with a great dash and commotion. John Gilsland helped Susan to descend, and finding some of his own friends immediately, while her brother's presence freed him from all responsibility concerning her, left the timid girl to herself. She stood alone for a moment, frightened and discouraged; then, seeing nothing better for it, followed Horace, who was in close conversation with the old man. She was not curious, nor even interested, in what they were saying; but she had never stood by herself before, exposed to the wondering gaze of strangers, and she felt secure when she could glide up beside her brother and stand close to him, even though he paid no

attention to her, nor noticed she was there.

"Well, and what were you going to Armitage Park for, eh? What business have you there?" said Horace, imperatively, to the old man.

"My lad, that's no' the gate to speak to me," said the pitman, "that am owld enough to be your grandsire. I'm a-gooin' for awl wan and, the same reason as ye cam' to me, my young gentleman. Sir John he's at the Park, and we've ta'en counsel, the neebors and me—them as seen me sign the paper, at your own bidding—and what we've settled is, Sir John's young Mr. Roger's friend; and if it was worth a gold sovereign to you, it's maybe worth a 'nuity or a bit pension to the man himsel'; so I'm a-gooin' to the Park to see Sir John, and try my loock—and that's awl."

"Sir John? Do you think Sir John will see *you?*" cried Horace, "you impatient old blockhead! Do you think *I* can't manage for you? Why don't you trust to me?"

"I'm an ould man; if it's to be ony gud to me, there's little time to lose," said the pitman, stoutly. "You're a clever lad, I'm

no' misdoubting, but ye're nouther the man himsel' nor his near friend. I hevn't ony time to lose, and a bird in the hand's worth twa in the bush—no meaning ony distrust of you, young gentleman. If the young Squire should find his advantage in knowing what I know, he mought weel spare a bit something by the week, ten shilling or so, to an owld man as won't be a burden upon nobody for lang."

"Don't you understand this is the very thing that I intended?" cried Horace, making —as Susan, who had gradually become interested, could perceive—the greatest effort to keep his temper. "To be sure, I'm trying all I can. I meant to let you know as soon as I could tell myself, but you'll spoil all if you interfere. Go back to Tinwood, like a sensible man; I'll see you in a day or two. A bird in the bush is better than no bird at all, I can tell you; and do you think Sir John, with a score of servants about him, would see you? Trust to me, and you shall have what you want in two or three days. I give you my word—are you not content?"

The old man grumbled and hesitated, but Horace's arguments were strong, and at last overcame his opposition. Horace was not content, however, with the reluctant consent to give up his project which he at last extorted. He followed the tottering old figure out of the place, negotiated with a carter who was going that way to give him "a lift" on the road to Tinwood, and stood in the road watching till he was quite out of sight, with a total forgetfulness of Susan and the train by which she had to travel. Susan followed him at a little distance, and stood doubtfully behind waiting for him, not knowing what else to do. He had forgotten her totally in the stronger interest of this more important concern; and when he did turn round, with a vexed and thoughtful face, the start and frown with which he recognized her standing so near him were anything but flattering to his sister.

"What do you mean, following me about and listening to my private affairs?" he cried, roughly. "Eavesdropper!—but I suppose that's like all women," he added, with bitter-

ness, and an adoption of his father's look and sentiment, which drove Susan to desperation for the moment.

"You are very wicked to say so," she exclaimed; "you!—do you not know why my father sent me away? Oh, Horace, is there no heart in you?—because of that letter; he said *I* took it—me!"

"And why not you?—you are so very virtuous, I suppose," said her brother, with a sneer; "you who can listen behind a man when he does not know you're there. However, this is not a place to cry and make a scene—come along, and get your train. If you are fortunate you can cry there, and make yourself interesting to somebody. Where is your money? I suppose you've got some money. I'll get your ticket for you; but remember, Susan," he said, turning back again, after he had proceeded a step or two before her on this errand—"remember! you may have heard something I'm concerned in without my knowing it—tell it to my uncle, if you dare!"

Susan made no reply—the menace and the

insulting words roused her; she followed him, without the slightest appearance of that inclination to cry with which he taunted her, with a flushed cheek and steady step, and no intention or thought of yielding any obedience to him. Fortunately the train was expected instantly, and there was small leisure for further leave-taking. He shook hands with her slightly as he helped her into the carriage, turned his back at once, and went away. It was so that Susan parted with her two nearest relatives. Honest John Gilsland, waving his hat as the train plunged along on its further course, touched her into those tears which her brother had checked in their fountain, but she choked them up in her handkerchief, with the remembrance of his taunt strong upon her; and so went forth alone, upon her first voyage and enterprise into the world, which scarcely could be so cruel to her as those she had left behind.

But Susan, deeply wounded as she was, did not lose all the long, silent, exciting day in tears or melancholy; her mind ran astray a little after the old pitman, and the story he

had to tell to Mr. Roger, which might gain him an annuity; and then escaped into anticipations which roused her out of herself. Shy and quiet in her corner, too much excited to eat Peggy's sandwiches, too shamefaced to venture forward to the book-stand, when the train stopped, to provide herself with amusement, keeping still in the same seat at the same window; shyly remembering Peggy's precaution, and ready to change only if the "woman person" who occupied another corner of the same carriage did so; Susan arrived at Edinburgh. She got there while it was still daylight, to her great comfort; and having argued the question with herself for an hour or two previously, and recollected that Uncle Edward had once spoken of taking a cab at the railway and driving to Milnehill, proceeded with trembling intrepidity to do the same thing. The cabman, whom the poor girl addressed with humble politeness, conveyed her in somewhere about two hours, along the darkening country road, during which time the beating of Susan's heart almost choked her. But she got there at last—saw the little door in the wall opened,

and recognised, in the perfumed breath of the atmosphere around her, the fragrance of those great, white turrets of chestnut-blossom, which built their fairy pinnacles in the garden of Milnehill. How she got through that darkling garden-walk Susan could not have told for her life; and the bright light and rejoicing welcome at the end of it; the start of delight, the warm embrace of the new house and unaccustomed love, were too much for the traveller. She could not speak to her uncle, and neither saw nor felt anything but a vague sensation of unspeakable rest and comfort, as they half led and half carried her over the safe threshold of Milnehill.

CHAPTER II.

WHILE the rapid railway, of which she was half afraid among all her other fears and excitements, carried Susan across the border, her brother hastened by himself along the country road to Kenlisle. It still wanted an hour of noon, but Horace was angry to be so late, and his thoughts were not of the most agreeable description. It was, to be sure, no personal loss to himself which could be brought about by the mission of the old pitman to Sir John Armitage, which he had stopped for this time, but might not be able to stop again; but if the story was actually told to Roger Musgrave's real friends, who would use it for the interests of the heir, there was an end of "the power" of Horace over the two attorneys,

whose breach of trust could no longer be concealed. Then he was furious to think that his sister had heard something, much or little, of his conversation with the old man, and might have it in her power to give a clue to the secret. While mingled with this immediate concern was a renewed impression of the importance which his father attached to Colonel Sutherland's letter, or at least to the information contained in it; and the most eager anxiety to get to London to resolve his fate, if that was possible, by investigations at Doctors' Commons into the will. Whose will was it? Was he justified in believing that even the name of Scarsdale was the real name of the family, or at least of the testator who had willed a "posthumous punishment and vengeance" upon his father? Horace could give no answer to these questions; he could not even resolve on hastening to town immediately, for his time was bound to the will of another, and his funds were exhausted. To wait was the only possibility which remained to him, and he did that with a sufficiently ill grace.

Mr. Stenhouse, however, was still at Kenlisle. As soon as he reached the office, and had ascertained that Mr. Pouncet was in his private room, in conference with his former partner, Horace lost no time in demanding an audience. He was received by the Kenlisle lawyer with the greatest evident reluctance and hesitation. Mr. Pouncet gave him the veriest little nod as he came in, and glanced from Horace to Mr. Stenhouse with an expression which seemed to say that he was the victim of a conspiracy, and that some new complot was hatching against his peace. He did not even ask the young man's business; the whole affair was growing unbearable to the man of character, who knew his reputation and credit to be in the hands of these two, yet who, frightened as he was, could scarcely veil his repugnance and impatience. Mr. Stenhouse, however, shook hands cordially with his new friend. "Well, Mr. Scarsdale?" he said, in his frankest tone, "any news?" *He* was not afraid; and to show that he had no occasion to be so, but that the whole burden of legal peril lay upon his unfortunate

colleague, was a pleasure and refreshment indescribable to Mr. Pouncet's amiable "friend."

"Not very pleasant news," said Horace; "I have just seen old Adam Brodie, the pitman, and stopped him on his way to Armitage Park. He has taken it into his head that Sir John might like to hear his story, and that it might be worth Mr. Musgrave's while to give him an annuity. He will make the whole public if his mouth is not stopped. I came instantly to let you know. He thinks the young Squire might give him ten shillings a-week; he thinks me a friend of the young Squire, so I have persuaded him to let me try what I can do."

"Ah! Pouncet, my dear fellow, this is your concern," said Mr. Stenhouse, with his broadest smile.

Mr. Pouncet grew graver than before; he raised his head a little from the papers over which he was bending, and spoke with the greatest hesitation, clearing his throat and stammering at every word.

"I—I don't see how it can be my con-

cern," he said; "who is Adam Brodie?—I —I never—heard the name."

"Unfortunately I know him, and so does our young friend here," said Mr. Stenhouse—"the old fellow who happened to be present when—ah, I see you recollect now! Awkward business, very—and Sir John Armitage himself is a client of yours; how very provoking! I'm afraid you'll have to do something about it, Pouncet; it would not answer you at all to have this affair known."

Mr. Pouncet did not look up; rage and provocation almost beyond bearing had risen within him, but he durst not show them. His very integrity and honour in other matters made the bondage of this one guilt more intolerable; he was enraged to be compelled to bow to it, but he dared not resist.

"The matter can be easily arranged, if Mr. Pouncet does not object to the cost," said Horace, trying the new *rôle* of peacemaker.

"If *I* do not object—what do you mean, sir?" cried Mr. Pouncet, with uncontrollable impatience; "what have I to do with it more than Stenhouse? This is a pleasant improve-

ment, certainly. D—— the whole concern!—I wish I had never had anything to do with it, with all my heart!"

"My dear fellow, compose yourself; it is too late for that; and, besides, it is you who are endangered," said the bland Mr. Stenhouse; "think of your own interest, my excellent friend."

Mr. Pouncet immediately betook himself to his papers as before, turning them over rapidly; he made no answer; habit had accustomed him to the civil taunts of Stenhouse—but he could not bear the same insulting inferences from a new voice.

"There is a very easy way of managing the matter," said Horace, once more; "the man is old, and has been long in your service. He lost his son in an accident at the pit two years ago; it is perfectly practicable to pension him on that account."

"And leave him free to seek another pension on the other," said Mr. Stenhouse; "won't do: no—they are rapacious, those people; that would only rouse his appetite, the old rogue. A man who gets one thing

easily always hankers for another. He'd try Sir John immediately, and double his terms. No, no; if he gets anything, he must understand distinctly what he gets it for. If I were you, Pouncet, I'd lose no time, either. He can't live long, that's one good thing."

"I never have bribed any man!" cried Mr. Pouncet, vehemently—"I'll not begin now. I don't mind doing my share for any old servant; but I—I can't stand this, Stenhouse! What do you mean by turning it all on me?"

"Simply because he can do me no harm, my dear fellow," said the smiling Mr. Stenhouse. "Stop now! don't let us get impatient; here is our young friend has something to say."

Mr. Stenhouse was already benevolently aware that the remarks of "our young friend" were gall and bitterness to his old partner, and perhaps if anything could have made Horace's new patron more gracious, it was this fact.

"I was about to say," said Horace, with a little eagerness, "that the old man believes

me a friend of the young Squire, as he calls him, and that I am quite willing to be made the channel of communication with him. If you trust it to me, he shall never know that the money does not come from Roger Musgrave; and my own opinion is that this will be the best arrangement. If he wants more money, at least he will come to *you* to seek it, and not to—"

The young man stopped short prudently, and went no further. Mr. Pouncet could not bear the emphasis upon that *you*, or the look of personal appeal which accompanied it, at least from any one but his old partner. He got up abruptly, and pushed his chair from the table.

"Stenhouse, will you settle this business? I'll agree to your decision," he said, pushing hastily away. "I've—I've got an appointment at twelve o'clock. I'm rather too late already; you can settle it without me."

Mr. Stenhouse smiled as he went, and so did Horace, almost without being aware of it. They had both a certain pleasure in the sufferings of their victim—a pure amateur en-

joyment, entirely distinct from any consideration of advantage; however, they settled the matter between them easily and rapidly enough. To be liberal with another man's means is no difficult matter. Mr. Stenhouse arranged that a sum sufficient for a year's stipend to the old pitman, at his own terms of ten shillings a-week, should be paid into the hands of Horace, who undertook to dispense it; and Horace, on his part, lost no time in demanding from his new employer a few days' leave of absence before proceeding to his post. Mr. Stenhouse was very curious to know why this sudden permission was asked from him—so curious, that he granted it only on condition that Horace should first be settled in his office, and ascertain the nature of his new duties. After he had spent a week in Harliflax, perhaps he might be spared for another week; and as he was going to London, as he said, why, Harliflax was so much nearer London than Kenlisle, and indeed on the way. With which decision Horace chafing considerably, but compelled to assent, had no alternative but to declare himself satisfied. It was so arranged accordingly. Mr.

Pouncet, when he returned, put his name to the required check, which certainly committed him to nothing, and might indeed appear nothing but a gratuity to the clerk who was about to leave him; and Horace put twenty pounds out of the six-and-twenty in his own pocket. Not that he meant to defraud the pitman, or anybody else, but he was completely indifferent whether the money he used for his own immediate purposes was his own, or Mr. Pouncet's, or the property of old Adam. He made full arrangement to have the weekly stipend paid to the old miner. He saw him indeed, paid him the first instalment himself, and persuaded the poor pensioner that his own bounty was the immediate source of this little income; his own bounty, subject to the approval of the young Squire. Then having done this Christian office, and procured for the ungrateful Mr. Pouncet the unwilling virtue of doing good by stealth, Horace, with Mr. Pouncet's twenty pounds in his pocket, started on his journey to Harliflax, full of hope, ambition, and expectation, with Doctors' Commons and the unknown will occupying

most of his thoughts. But a week—no more —and he should know what was his "singular and unhappy fortune," and what the mysterious document which was supposed to have influenced him in his earliest childhood, and had broken all ties of nature between himself and his father, actually was.

CHAPTER III.

Mr. Stenhouse, whatever his motive or purpose might be, received Horace, on his arrival at Harliflax, where the lawyer had preceded his new clerk by a few days, with great civility and kindness. Perhaps Mr. Stenhouse was not much more beloved in his present residence than he had been in Kenlisle; but he was now a man of some wealth and importance, and his house had other attractions, which kept "society" in Harliflax on very good terms with him. The lawyer's household was a little out of the common order of such dwelling-places. It was divided by a singular separation, but not divided against itself. Two distinct and incompatible phases of life went on within its walls; but the one dis-

played no antagonism, and fought no battles with the other; and any Quixote who had chosen to take up arms for a wife neglected and a mother set aside, would have been as completely in the wrong as ever Quixote was. The family consisted of three daughters, aged from fifteen to nineteen, and of one boy, a child five years younger than his youngest sister, a hopeless little invalid, born to suffering. The girls were the daylight surface of the family, the pride of their father, and the supreme influence in the house. Two of them were pretty, the eldest as near beautiful as it could fall to the fate of an imperfectly educated provincial *belle* to be; and all three expensive and extravagant to the very verge of their means and opportunities. Over such a trio of young uncontrollable spirits—and the Misses Stenhouse were innocent of sentiment, and neither had nor pretended any devotion for their mother—the nervous and timid woman who was the nominal mistress of the lawyer's house could exercise no sway. Years ago, when Amelia, the beauty, was but just beginning to be conscious of her own

perfections, and to assert herself accordingly, Mrs. Stenhouse had retired from the contest. The lovely young termagant had scarcely put off her last pinafore, when she found herself triumphant mistress of the drawing-room, while her mother fell back upon that never-failing interest and occupation which the poor woman wept over and believed one of the sorest afflictions of her life, but which was in fact its great preservative—the illness and weakness of her boy. Little Edmund and she lived together in a touching and perfect unity in the comfortable parlour downstairs, while the young ladies entertained their own friends and enjoyed their own pleasures above. Perhaps Mrs. Stenhouse did not do her duty by consenting to this tacit arrangement; but, like most weak people, she was so perfectly convinced that she could not help herself, that she was quite unable for the task from which she shrank, and would have done her daughters more harm than good by keeping up an unavailing contest, that her conscience did not disturb her in the loving performance of her other duty, her unwearied care of little

Edmund, from which nothing ever diverted or withdrew the entire heart of his mother. This invisible fireside in the back parlour, where Edmund, despotic and imperious as only a child-invalid can be, tyrannized over his constant companion, and shared every thought she had, seemed no very important influence in the family to a cursory observer; but the household itself was perfectly aware that any distinct desire proceeding thence from little Edmund's sharp, high-pitched, childish voice, was law even to Edmund's father; and that the decrepid child, who did not even particularly appreciate or return his affection, was the very apple of that father's eye; his son, his heir, his representative; though nobody, save the two most deeply interested, the father and mother, believed or expected that the child could ever live to be a man.

This second domestic centre of Mr. Stenhouse's affections and interests was, however, invisible and unknown to Horace Scarsdale, when the unusual distinction of an invitation to dinner opened his employer's house to him a day or two after his arrival. He saw, it is

true, the silent mother seated at the head of the table, nervously and quietly impatient of the time occupied there; and he observed that she disappeared from the drawing-room very early in the evening, and took little or no part in what was going on there. But Horace had neither eyes nor curiosity for Mrs. Stenhouse: he was more agreeably occupied. He who entered the lawyer's house with all his usual disdainful indifference—except in so far as they might serve him—to the people whom he was about to meet, had encountered a new influence, which proved too much for him at that undreaded table. All unprepared and unarmed as he was, a sudden and alarming accident, altogether beyond his calculations and out of his reckoning, happened to Horace; the young man fell in love!

This extraordinary and unexpected event took Horace much by surprise. It was the first time in his life that he had not scorned womankind and all its influences; but Amelia Stenhouse was an entirely new development of feminity. She was very — extremely handsome, in the first place, and she was

authoritative and imperious, and had a kind of wit which her beauty made brilliant and successful. Used to homage and admiration, accustomed to believe that it became *her*, and was her privilege to do unusual things and make unusual speeches, and audaciously confident in her own powers, she shone upon Horace like a new species unknown and undiscovered before; and the contrast offered by her exuberant beauty, "dash," and presumption, was irresistibly piquant to the brother of Susan, on whom a tamer and sweeter beauty might have shone for years in vain. Horace neither knew the moment nor the means by which that amazing accident befell him; but it had happened long before the other people had eaten their dinner, transcending such common earthly occupations as much in speed as in importance. Neither did he know how the evening passed, in his sudden and strange intoxication. His new passion partook of the nature of all sublime and primitive emotions, so far, at least, as to blot out the little cross-bars of time from the young man's consciousness, and blur these hours into

one exciting moment. He was transported even out of himself—a more remarkable result—and turned his back upon Mr. Stenhouse, and forgot his own interest, in devouring with his eyes, and pursuing with his attentions, this new star called Amelia, whom already—arrogant even in his love—he determined upon appropriating, however she or any one else might choose to object.

Uncareful of either etiquette or propriety, Horace stayed as long as he could stay, and only took his leave at length in obedience to hints which there was no mistaking. He went downstairs hurriedly, wrapt in his dream, all the air before him filled with two objects, intensely visible, and eclipsing all the world besides; which two objects were, Amelia Stenhouse, and that unknown document in Doctors' Commons which was to reveal to Horace his fate; when his course was suddenly and singularly interrupted. He had just reached the foot of the staircase, when a door was timidly opened, a glow of firelight came flushing into the hall, and the quiet little woman to whom he had been presented a few hours before, but

whose voice he had not yet heard, stood doubtful and hesitating before him. Only for a moment, however, for, urged by an exclamation from within, Mrs. Stenhouse hastily addressed the stranger: "Mr. Scarsdale! Oh, come in here for a moment, please!" she cried nervously. Taken by surprise, and scarcely knowing what he did, Horace followed her. The room was very warm, carpeted and curtained into a sort of noiseless, airless luxury, which was half suffocating to the healthy and vigorous senses of the unwilling visitor; and near the fire, in an easy-chair, sat a small boy, pale-faced and sharp-featured, restlessly wide awake, as children are when kept up beyond their usual hour, and full of eagerness about something, with a whole volume of questions in his face. This was the little hermit of the luxurious seclusion into which Horace, who knew nothing about the boy, and had not even heard of his existence, was thus mysteriously introduced. The little fellow measured his visitor with those sharp inquisitive eyes, and addressed another adjuration to his mother. Edmund's "Now, mamma!"

exclaimed somewhat impatiently, acted like a spur upon the timid woman. She started, and tremulously began a string of confused yet eager questions.

"Oh, Mr. Scarsdale! I beg your pardon! They told me you came from Kenlisle," cried Mrs. Stenhouse. "There is some one near there—Yes, Edmund, darling! wait an instant. Some one who—his name is Roger Musgrave. Did you ever hear of him? Do you know him? Could you give me any news of my—of—of—the young gentleman? Perhaps you may have heard of Tillington Grange, if you know the country. Do you think they have heard anything there of—of—. Oh, I beg your pardon! it is too much to expect that you should know."

"I used to know Roger Musgrave very well," said Horace. "I lived near Tillington when I was a boy."

"I say, sir, we've got a right to know," cried the sharp little voice out of the easy-chair. "He's my brother, *he* is; don't mind what mamma says. *I* am not afraid to ask for him. I've sat up on purpose. I want to

hear all about Roger. How much is he bigger than you?"

"Oh, my darling child, the gentleman will be angry! He's a sad invalid, Mr. Scarsdale; everybody indulges him," cried poor Mrs. Stenhouse. "Pray, pray, don't be displeased!"

"He's a good deal bigger than me," said Horace, half amused, and half spiteful, answering the question with an involuntary grudge, and increased impulse of dislike to poor Roger, whose additional inches—poor advantage though that was—it galled him for the moment to remember.

The child clapped his hands. "How much?" he cried, with a little childish shout of triumph. The sight would have been touching enough to any one who had the heart to be moved by it. But Horace saw nothing that was not ludicrous in the poor little dwarfish invalid's eager and exultant curiosity about the size and strength of his unknown brother. He laughed in spite of himself.

"About two inches, perhaps," he said; "I have not heard anything of Musgrave lately,"

he continued, turning to the mother; "you know, perhaps, that he enlisted and went abroad; but I have an uncle—Colonel Sutherland, you may have heard of him—who took poor Roger up; he is very likely to know."

The scant civility and supercilious tone of this reply lost all its effect upon Mrs. Stenhouse from the name contained in it—"Colonel Sutherland! Oh, Edmund, darling! the dear old Colonel who was so kind to Roger!" she said, with tears in her eyes; "and to think a relation of his should come here! Oh, Mr. Scarsdale, if there is anything we can do for you, I or my poor boy (and Mr. Stenhouse will do anything to please Edmund), you have only to say it—oh, thank you, thank you, a hundred times! My dearest child, it is very late, we must not keep Mr. Scarsdale longer to-night; another time perhaps he will come in and see us and tell us more. Good night, good night! Say good night, darling, to the gentleman; and thank you a hundred times, Mr. Scarsdale. I am so very, very glad you have come here!"

Saying which, Mrs. Stenhouse preceded her

visitor to the street-door, and opened it for him with her own trembling hands.

He went away with a smile on his lip; but it was only a smile of momentary ridicule, and bore no kindly meaning. That sad little secret romance of domestic life had neither charm nor sentiment for Horace. Without discovering what was in it, he plunged back into his own novel passion and excitement, in which, as was sufficiently natural, the young man passed that night and the remainder of his week in Harliflax as in a rapid and exciting dream. Falling in love was no softening enchantment for Horace; it did not involve affection, or respect, or tenderness, those sentiments and principles which act upon a man's whole nature. It made no difference on his opinion of other people, or his dealings with other people, that he had fallen in love with Amelia Stenhouse. No sweet imaginations of home or hearth clung round the object of his sudden passion; he neither endowed herself with imaginary perfections, nor thought better of his neighbours, for her sake; but still, according to his nature, he was "in love." His thoughts

burned and glowed about the lawyer's beautiful daughter; he wanted her, without inquiring what, or what manner of spirit she was—a sturdy principle of love on the whole, and one which perhaps wears better than a more sentimental preference; but its immediate influence upon Horace was not particularly elevating. If it had been necessary, however, to fix and intensify his anxious curiosity concerning that unknown document in Doctors' Commons, this sudden attachment was the sharpest spur which could have been applied; for here alone lay the means by which the beauty might be appropriated and taken possession of. And every circumstance concurred to convince Horace of the importance of the discovery he had made at Marchmain. He saw the position of affairs there without any mistake or self-deception; perceived, with perfect clearness, that the letter which he had taken had been missed from his father's desk, and coolly contented himself with the knowledge that Susan had been banished from home for his fault. "So much the better for Susan," he said to himself, with entire composure; and

it did not trouble him in the least that both Susan and Peggy must be quite aware who was the real criminal. He hoped, indeed, to be able very shortly to make the consequences of that theft apparent enough; for in all Horace's calculations the thought of some immediate issue followed without pause his investigation of the will. The impatience of youth and inexperience—mingling with all the calculations and designs of his unyouthful and ungenerous intelligence, the foresight and cold selfishness of age—made his very imaginations covetous and grasping; but the youth in his veins betrayed him into dreams of a conclusion as rapid as it was brilliant. He could form his schemes with all the coolness of an old man, but he could not wait for his fortune; like a young man, he was determined to have it now.

This point accordingly was one on which he concluded without doubt or hesitation. He did not know what fortune might have in store for him; he could not tell what mysterious inheritance lay waiting, till he should make his

momentous discovery; but he felt convinced that to enter upon the immediate enjoyment of these unknown and concealed riches he had but to find this secret out. With all the cold blood of age, totally careless and indifferent to any results which did not affect himself, he leapt at the rapid conclusion of youth, and found wealth, love, and luxury in a sudden windfall of extraordinary fortune. So, happily unaware of his own inconsistency, Horace lived in a fever through the few tedious days which he was obliged to spend in Harliflax, in the monotonous occupations of Mr. Stenhouse's office, with only one other glimpse of Amelia before he could start on his important journey. Steady though his selfish intelligence was, the hours danced and buzzed over him in a dizzy whirl. He stood on the threshold of a dazzling and splendid fortune, the future of a fairy tale. He stood like a knight of romance, with his lady's name upon his lips, impatient to enter the charmed gateway, and read in the enchanted scroll the secret of his fate; but the talisman which should roll

back these solemn gates of the future was no spell for the lips of a true knight; and romantic as his position might be, Horace Scarsdale occupied it in no romantic frame of mind. The romance of his attitude was all unwitting and unwilling, the work of circumstances. And it was not to conquer fortune, but to hunt for a cruel bit of paper, that, burning with suppressed eagerness, he set out for that London which to him meant only Doctors' Commons, bent upon two ideas which occupied his whole being — Amelia Stenhouse and the Will.

CHAPTER IV.

WHILE Horace made *his* beginning full of new emotions and interests at Harliflax, Susan entered into a kind of miraculous happiness and comfort, which her very brightest dreams had never ventured to imagine before. For none of the wonders of romance had happened to Susan; she had not "fallen in love," nor entered even to the precincts of that charmed condition in which everything is possible to the youthful fancy. No gallant knight had dropped out of the skies or come across the moor, to transport her into that perennial garden of enchantment, which will always remain a refuge for young imaginations while the world lasts. Yet Susan, seated in Colonel Sutherland's cosy dining-room, making tea

at the round table, where the white table-cloth fell in fragrant shining folds over the crimson cover, and where all the *agrémens* of a Scotch breakfast showed themselves in dainty good order; with the windows open, the sun shining upon the garden, the birds singing, the sweetness of spring in the sweet morning air, which had found out all the hidden primroses and violets, and some precocious lilies of the valley beneath the trees, before it came in here to tell the secret of their bloom; and all those secondary delights, warmed and brightened by the face of love, beaming across that kindly board—the tender, fatherly face, indulgent and benign as the very skies—happy in all her pleasures, happy with a still dearer charm and unintended flattery in the very sight of her, and the consciousness of her presence; Susan did not know how to contain the joy of her heart. To think of Marchmain sitting here safe in Milnehill dining-parlour; to think of all her past life, with its melancholy solitude and friendlessness!—to think how little account anybody had ever made of *her*, whom all this

bright house brightened to receive, and whom everybody here looked to as the crown of comfort and pledge of increased happiness! Susan had cried over it a dozen times during these first wonderful days—now she began to grow accustomed to her happiness. It touched her still with a sweet amazement of gratitude, in which there mingled a certain compunction. It seemed scarcely right to feel so happy when she could still return by a thought to that dreary moor and melancholy house, and remember how her father lived miserably by himself in his austere solitude, and that she was an outcast, banished from her natural home. But it was difficult to give importance to the passion of Mr. Scarsdale, and the contempt of Horace, in the sunshiny presence of Uncle Edward. The old man inclining his deaf ear towards her with *that* smile upon his face, put Susan's troubles to flight in spite of herself; she could not entertain either pain or grief in those bright rooms, where she was installed so joyfully as mistress; she could not have the heart to spoil Uncle Edward's pleasure by a sad look, even if

she had been able to preserve sad looks through so much astonishing gladness of her own.

Everything was new to her in this new home. The friends who hastened to see her on the Colonel's invitation, and whom he took her to see; the young people like herself, who were pleased to make Susan's acquaintance, but of whose "education" and "accomplishments" Susan all unaccomplished and uninstructed stood in awe. The wonder of finding that her own ignorance, fresh and intelligent as it was, rather attracted than repelled many of her new friends; the very necessity of making an evening toilette, and having to interest herself in pretty fashions of evening dress; and to get Uncle Edward's Indian muslins, in their impossible delicacy, the things that she had once wondered over as ornaments of her drawers, but beyond all mortal use, actually made into ordinary gowns, and to wear them! — everything bewildered Susan into additional happiness. And that breakfast-table, with its post arrival, its letters and news—the epistles of her young cousins, the

bits of pleasant gossip from the Colonel's old correspondents, all communicated to herself, with an evident pleasure in having her there to listen to them; the common family confidences and comforts which make up the daily life of most young people, made Susan's cup run over with unanticipated refinements of delight. At first every additional touch of domestic happiness was too much for her composure, and the spring skies were not more showery in their joy than those blue eyes, which could scarcely be convinced to believe themselves or acknowledge the reality of the sunshine and light around; but before the first week was over, Susan had begun to wonder how she could have managed to exist through the past, and to feel as though she had *lived* only in those happy days, the first days she had spent in a home.

About the same day as that on which Horace set out for London, Susan sat making tea at Milnehill breakfast-table, while Uncle Edward read his letters opposite. One of these letters, as it happened, was from Roger Musgrave. Something had been doing

among the Caffres, in which Roger had distinguished himself, and an account of the affair appeared that very morning in the *Times*, where a brief but flattering mention of the young volunteer delighted beyond measure his fast friend. Susan, it is impossible to deny, listened with unusual interest both to the letter and the newspaper report. It was wonderful how clearly she remembered Roger Musgrave, how he looked, and all about him. She even liked to continue the conversation in that channel, and keep her uncle from digressing to Ned or Tom, or old Sinclair of the Forty-second; and with this shy purpose suddenly bethought herself of Horace's encounter with the old pitman, of which she had been a witness, but which happier events had driven until now out of her thoughts.

"Had Horace anything to do with Mr. Musgrave, uncle?" she asked, somewhat timidly.

"Eh? Horace? Not that I am aware of," said the Colonel; "but your brother, my love, is inscrutable, and might have to do with the Rajah of Sarawak, for anything I know."

"I never heard they were friends," said Susan, musingly. "I wonder what Horace could mean? You would have thought he was managing something for Mr. Musgrave, to hear how he spoke to that old man; and he told me—oh!" cried Susan, stopping abruptly, growing very red, and looking somewhat scared, in Uncle Edward's face.

"What, my dear child?" said the benign Colonel, with a smile.

"Oh, uncle! he told me not to tell you," said Susan, with a mixture of fright and boldness. "It must have been something wrong."

"Then perhaps you had better not tell me," said Uncle Edward, rather gravely. "I should be sorry to have a suspicion of either Roger or Horace. Never tell anything that seems to be wrong until you are sure of it, Susan. It may be safe enough to praise upon slight grounds, but never, my dear, to blame."

"That is how you treat me, Uncle Edward," said Susan, looking up brightly with recovered courage — "but this is different. What could anybody have to tell Mr. Musgrave, uncle, which would be worth paying a

pension or an annuity for? — ten shillings a-week the old man said; and he was going to Armitage Park, but Horace would not let him. Horace seemed to be managing it all, as if it was for the young Squire: he said so even in words. Uncle, I wonder what it could be?"

"A pension of ten shillings a-week!" exclaimed Colonel Sutherland. The old man reddened with a painful colour. Unsuspicious of evil as he was, he had lived long in the world, and knew its darker side. The first idea which occurred to him was that of some youthful vice which this payment was to hide; and he was grieved to his heart.

"It sounded like—" said Susan, who was perfectly ignorant of her auditor's thoughts, and innocently went on pursuing her own— "it sounded like as if something had been found out about Mr. Musgrave's property or something, and that it would do him good, and that he would be so thankful to hear it that he would give the money directly; and Horace must have thought so, too, for he promised to get it for the old man. I wonder

what could have been found out; for all the land was sold—was it not, uncle?—and Mr. Musgrave was poor."

"I doubt if he has ten shillings a-week for himself of his own," said the Colonel, hastily.

"Then, uncle, something must have been found out!" cried Susan—"I am sure of it, from the way the old man spoke; and Horace promised to get him the pension, and would not let him go to Armitage. That was a little strange, wasn't it?—because Sir John, you told me, uncle, was Mr. Musgrave's great friend, and I never believed that Horace even knew him until that day."

"Odd enough, to be sure. I did not know it either, Susan. They don't look much like a pair of friends," said the puzzled Colonel; "and your brother—hum—Horace is very clever, my dear," said Uncle Edward, with a grieved look, and a slight sigh. He did not want to think any harm of his nephew, but the old man could not make the young schemer out.

"I hope, uncle, it is not anything very wrong," said Susan, faltering a little.

"I hope not, my dear," said the Colonel; but they coucluded their breakfast much more silently than usual, neither of them looking very comfortable; and, for the first time, Susan was rather glad when the meal was over, and herself at liberty. She went out into the garden among the flowers, as was her wont, but even that sweet exhilarating spring atmosphere, the rustle of leaves and ripple of sound that gladdened the morning, did not withdraw her thoughts from that perplexing subject. The more she hoped that it was nothing wrong, the more settled became her conviction that it *was*, and that deceit, or treachery of some kind, was involved in the transaction. And then a battle ensued in her private heart. Roger Musgrave was nothing to Susan, and Horace was her only brother; was it her part to search into the secrets of her nearest relatives, in order to befriend a stranger? With an uneasy consciousness of undue interest in one so little known to her, Susan blushed, and shrank from this idea; yet her honest thoughts, once roused, were not to be put to rest even by a scruple of

girlish delicacy. To see harm done, and stand by passive, was as impossible to this girl as to the strongest champion in existence. It was against her nature. She could not do it, were the wrong-doer her nearest and dearest friend.

An hour or two later Colonel Sutherland came into the drawing-room, where Susan sat at work, with her thoughts busy about this matter. The old soldier loitered about, poking his gray moustache into the pretty book-shelves, as though he had suddenly grown short-sighted, and impending with the stoop habitual to his deafness over Susan's chair. He had something to say, but was reluctant to say it, lest he should wound, even by implication, the feelings of his young guest.

"Susan," said the Colonel, at last, abruptly —he thought he spoke as if the subject had suddenly occurred to him, while, in reality, it was most distinctly visible that he had been pondering nothing else since he entered the room; "thinking over what you told me this morning, I rather think it might be as well to write to Armitage—eh? Very likely it is nothing, you know; but still, if any one in that

district *does* know anything that might be of service to young Musgrave—why, my love, it seems as well that we should know."

He looked at her doubtfully from under his gray eyebrows, laying a caressing hand upon her hair. He was afraid she would not like this proposal, and still more afraid that, alarmed in the quick and tender pride of family affection, she would guess and resent his suspicion of her brother. But Susan looked up quickly, without any shade of offence upon her face, which, however, had become very grave.

"I am afraid of Horace, uncle," she said, simply and sadly; "he is my own brother, and it is dreadful to say so; but I am not sure of him, as you are of my cousins. Since I think of it, I am afraid it is something wrong."

"Then you do not object, and I may write to Armitage?" said Uncle Edward. "Thank you, my dear child; perhaps we shall find it all a mistake, and Horace the most upright of us all. I trust so; he is very clever, Susan, and clever boys are sometimes tempted

into scheming—eh? And besides, poor fellow, he has had little justice in his own life. I will write, then, my love, and I hope everything will come perfectly clear."

So saying, the Colonel went away, to confide Susan's story to Sir John Armitage, and beg his attention to it. To seek out "an old man," who knew something to Roger's advantage, without either name or place to trace him by, was rather a hard task to impose upon the indolent baronet; and so Susan thought as her uncle left her. But still, it was a satisfaction to have the letter written. It is always satisfactory to transfer a portion of one's own personal uneasiness to somebody else. They hoped a little and wondered a great deal each in private, with very little communication on the subject, while they waited for Sir John's reply; and if Roger had wanted anything before of the requisites necessary for a hero in Susan's imagination, he had fully acquired it now. He was young, brave, handsome, generous, and *perhaps* he was injured—could any knight of romance require more?

CHAPTER V.

FORGETTING totally for the time all lesser projects, and suffering Mr. Pouncet and old Adam, Roger Musgrave and his lost property, to fall behind him into complete oblivion, though it was the Kenlisle lawyer's sovereigns which paid his fare to London, Horace set out to seek his fortune. He had never been so confident in his expectations; and if any one had informed him during that journey of the suspicions which his uncle and Susan discussed slightly and pondered deeply, the doubts of his own honour and uprightness which both entertained, and the inquiries which were likely to be set on foot to satisfy them, he would have laughed his laugh of supreme disdain, spurning that past transaction as too in-

significant to help or harm him. Adam Brodie, and the "power" over Mr. Pouncet and Mr. Stenhouse which his story gave, had been sufficiently important to Horace a short time before; but the young man was in an elevated and dizzy state of mind. He was going to find out an unknown fairy fortune; the crock of gold was almost visible; he did not feel sure that he should return to Harliflax in less than a coach-and-six, with an old-fashioned braggadocio of triumph; and what were all the previous schemes and expedients of his humble fortune to the exultant heir who was coming to his kingdom? By dint of constant thought on the subject and intense desire, he had succeeded in convincing himself that this kingdom only awaited discovery, and was just about to fall into his full possession. A hundred Adam Brodies could not harm Horace, and what was Mr. Pouncet and his secret to him?

In this condition of mind, though growing somewhat anxious as the moment of certainty approached, Horace, in strong but restrained excitement, pale with the fire that burned in his veins and withdrew the blood from his

cheek, hastened from the City tavern, where he had found a lodging, round the quiet side of St. Paul's, to that strange old den of fortune, where tragic family secrets by the thousand lie recorded, and where the domestic history of a whole nation accumulates in silence. He disappeared beneath the archway, anxious yet confident; the blaze of his triumph ready to burst forth, his thoughts rushing forward in spite of him to the splendours which lay almost within reach, to his marriage with Amelia, to all the pleasures and domination of sudden wealth. An hour or two afterwards he came out again a different man. He had found his fortune—but it was passion, and not triumph, that burned in his downcast eyes. His face was no longer pale, but red with a sullen flush of impotent resentment and hatred. He went through the crowd elbowing his way like a man who had a quarrel with all the world; he went straight across the crowded streets, and pushed his way among waggons and omnibuses with a certain fierce defiance of accident, and impulse of opposition. When he got to his tavern, the first thing he did

was to call a cab, into which he flung his little carpet-bag, as if that homely conveniency had done him mortal injury, and in a voice of passion desired to be driven instantly to the railway. Alas! that was no coach-and-six, either morally or visibly, in which Horace returned to Harliflax, and to the clerk's life in Mr. Stenhouse's office, which this morning he regarded with lordly and lofty disdain. He sat back, an image of silent and self-consuming rage, in his corner of the second-class railway carriage; rage which dried up every comfortable sensation out of his mind; rage at himself, who had been thus deceived; at the dead man who had left him, in the first place, this bitter vexation and disappointment, and at the living man, who lived to thwart him, and keep him out of his rightful possessions. Not a remorseful thought of the life-long wrong which had soured his father's spirit and destroyed his life occurred to the congenial temper of his father's son. A true Scarsdale, Horace proved his legitimacy by the unmixed self-regard which plunged him into that sudden passion. From his own point

of view he took up the expressions of his father's letter. They were rivals to the death. That event, long ago accomplished, which Horace knew for the first time to-day, had abrogated the bonds of nature between them at the very beginning of the son's life; and already a horrible impatience of the father's existence stole unawares over the mind of the young man. That lonely, miserable, misanthrope's life which the recluse endured at Marchmain kept the heir out of his inheritance—kept the youth from his will—the bridegroom from his bride; and Horace set his teeth, thinking of it. In that chain of resentful and selfish cogitations one idea followed another too rapidly to be checked. Horace could not help it, and was scarcely aware at first how the thought, vexatious and galling, stole into his mind, that Mr. Scarsdale was still in the fulness of his days, and might live to thwart him for many a long year. The red colour flushed deeper to his face, and his hand clenched involuntarily as the idea occurred to him. Day after day, and year after year, till his own youth had died out of his

veins; till Amelia Stenhouse was out of his reach, and life and wealth had lost half their charms; that unlovely existence might linger on at Marchmain, and keep him out of his inheritance. What sudden rush of breathless suggestion, not daring to breathe in shape of words or definite expressions, flooded his mind for one violent moment after that we will not venture to say; but the next instant Horace wiped his wet forehead, on which great drops of moisture hung, and threw open the window to draw breath, and hide himself from himself. When he looked in again, he had made a violent effort, and turned his mind into another channel. Crime or madness — heaven knows which—lay the way he had been going, and the first glance had sickened him with mortal terror. He turned away from the dread unwilling thought with the first conscious effort against evil which he had ever made. The evil was monstrous, and appalled him: he was not bad enough to cogitate *that*, even in his most secret thoughts.

But here stood the facts, certain and unchangeable. Fortune, as dazzling as he had

ever hoped for, lay within Horace's sight, his lawful inheritance; but between him and that glorious vision stood the black figure of the disinherited—his father, through whose lineal hands the family wealth ought to have flowed. What did he live for—that unhappy, solitary man?—what was the good of an existence which dragged its melancholy days out after such a fashion? Horace understood now what was the meaning of "posthumous punishment and vengeance," and what bitter effect the disappointed man had given to his father's cruel will; but the heir was not sorry for the hermit of Marchmain. Pity found no entrance into the self-absorbed mind of Horace; he saw his own position merely and no other, and thought as little of Mr. Scarsdale's lifelong tragedy as if the recluse had been a wooden image; a scarecrow to keep him off his enchanted land. Yet something more; though he resisted it, the dark thought would return to increase the turmoil of his mind. His father was still young, a strong man in the vigour and flush of life. Again and again that dark red flush rose to the young man's

cheek, and the dew hung heavy on his forehead. Ten years, twenty years—who could prophesy how long that dreary life might hang and linger out yonder on the dreary moor? The good, the just, the lives most loved and prized, fade out of human ways; but the man accursed and excommunicated lives on. This man, perhaps, whose death would scarcely call a tear to any eye, would die most likely a very patriarch of disappointment, hatred, and misery; while his son, the heir, lingered out the blossom of his life in daily drudgery, unconsidered and poor.

This idea pertinaciously clinging to his mind might have crazed a better heart than that of Horace; him it persecuted with a shuddering chill of inarticulate suggestions which paled his cheeks, yet stirred his mind with the wild excitement of temptation and crime. Crime! he was familiar enough with wickedness; but that ruffian whispering in his ear sickened him to the heart, yet moved his pulses with a tingle of passion. Wealth beyond his reckoning, power, riches, and Amelia, and only one desolate life standing between his strong arm and

that threefold prize. The whisper which horrified him, but which he still listened to, stole into his heart as he went on; he had not closed his door against it. Already a fiercer excitement than he had ever known grew upon him and consumed him: he was innocent—he had never lifted his hand against life, nor shed blood; yet the passion and horror took hold upon him as if he were already guilty. How the hours and miles of his journey passed he was ignorant; when he had mechanically alighted at Harliflax he called himself fool not to have gone on; on, he did not know why, to that charmed spot, charmed by enmity and hostile passions, where his father, his hinderer, the bitter obstacle between him and fortune, dragged through his melancholy days. There was no influence upon the miserable young man to dispel the gloom of incipient murder from his heart; his very love, such as it was, urged him instead of staying him. He went on to the lodging which he had left yesterday with such different thoughts, in a brooding fit of hatred and disgust with himself and everybody else, afraid of the dreadful thought

which made his pulses leap and his veins tingle, yet yielding to its fierce excitement, and permitting its fire of hideous temptation to light his path. A ghastly light; but it strung his nerves so high, and excited his mind so intensely, that by-and-bye the intoxicating influence was all that he was aware of, and the idea growing familiar ceased to horrify him. What was it?—but not even in the deepest silence could the coward crime shape itself into words. It was there, and he knew it. That was enough for the devil who had led, and the spirit which followed. He went through the darkness and the peaceful streets with this deadly inspiration within him; his thoughts hovering like so many spies, and closing in dark battalions round the house on the moor, where childhood and youth had passed for Horace. He had still almost a week's freedom—what was he to do?

CHAPTER VI.

When Horace arrived at his lodgings he found two letters awaiting him, which gave a momentary diversion to the dark current of his thoughts. One of them was from Colonel Sutherland, being an innocent device of that innocent old soldier to draw a candid and frank reply out of his nephew's uncandid soul. Out of his dismal passion and murderous thoughts Horace came down to something like his old everyday contempt of other people, as he read his uncle's letter, which ran thus:—

"My dear Horace—I have lately learnt by accident that you know Roger Musgrave, which I was not aware of; and as the youth has interested me very much, I would gladly know

what you, with your superior penetration, think and know of him. I will tell you frankly what makes me wish this. Susan had begun to tell me of some encounter of yours with an old man at the railway, in which mention was made of young Musgrave, when she suddenly remembered that you did not wish her to mention it. This, of course, as you will suppose, knowing the nature of garrulous old men and gossips like myself, made me ten times more curious, and I managed to get out of Susan some vague story about a pension and something that had been found out. Susan is ignorant as a girl should be of a young man's follies, but I unfortunately know better. I wish you would tell me, if you can without breaking confidence, the rights of this story, and whether it is to hide some youthful sin that Musgrave is expected to pay somebody a pension. If it should be so, believe me, my dear boy, who know life and the world, that it is far better to tell all. Pay the money if need be, but hide nothing; it is fatal policy, trust an old man's word.

"Susan is very well and happy with me,

where I hope you will come and see this flown bird, and where we have always a bed and a welcome for my sister's son. Come when you can—the sooner the better; and while this unfortunate difference lasts between you and your father, it would give me great pleasure, my dear boy, if you would look upon Milnehill as your home.

"Affectionately your uncle,

"E. SUTHERLAND."

This simple-minded letter brought Horace back to himself for the moment. He read it over a second time, with one of his familiar sneers, and, with scarcely the pause of a minute, hunted up writing materials in a cold corner of his half-lighted room, and rushed into a premature and imprudent reply.

"Your acuteness, my dear uncle," wrote Horace, "has not led you astray. Of course I could enter into no explanations with a girl like Susan, from whose ears one would naturally keep everything of the kind. But you are quite right in your supposition. Such insight as yours into our little concealments is a more effectual argument than any

other to prevent us young fellows from trying to hide what cannot be hidden. I cannot enter into any particulars, and it seems needless to say anything more than that you are right.

"Thank you for your kind offer of a home at Milnehill; and with love to Susan, believe me in haste,

"Your dutiful nephew,

"HORACE SCARSDALE."

This letter was closed and thrown aside before Horace perceived the other one which lay on the table before him. He turned it over half suspiciously. In a female handwriting, and sent evidently by some private messenger, the look of it puzzled him who had no correspondents. Then the signature threw him into a flush of eager anxiety. What could induce Amelia Stenhouse to write to *him?* But, after all, the contents were commonplace enough. It was a very brief note, dated from her father's house the morning of this same day:—

"DEAR SIR—Papa is suddenly taken ill.

The doctors fear it looks like cholera, and he is rather alarmed himself. He wishes to see you immediately, if you can come. I hope this may reach you soon, and that you will be able to return directly, for he seems anxious to see you, as if he had something to say.

"Yours sincerely,

"AMELIA STENHOUSE."

It was some little time before Horace understood distinctly the contents of this note; for he was a lover, unlovely though his love was, and the first communication moved him into a momentary tumult, in which the words lost their due meaning. When he turned over to the address, however, and the "to be forwarded immediately" caught his eye, he began to rouse himself to a consciousness of the urgent circumstances. Mr. Stenhouse was ill, and wanted to see him. Twenty-four hours ago Horace would have supposed that his employer knew something of his father's secret. Now he was somewhat indifferent as to any communication which Mr. Stenhouse might have to make. But he was Amelia's father, and

she was likely to be there. He got up accordingly, in the haste which was congenial to his agitated condition, and made his toilette rapidly, but with unusual care. He was pale, and his passion of evil thoughts had left traces upon his face; but the very excitement of those murderous fancies lighted an unusual fire in his eye, and animated the countenance, which, in common times, was not a remarkable face. As he went out he took up the letter he had written to his uncle, and tossed it carelessly into the post as he passed, thinking, with a momentary contemptuous wonder as he did so, of the simple old man who had opened his arms and heart to Susan, and who held open for Horace himself that warm domestic shelter, the home of which the young man felt no need. The contrast was wonderful enough—Uncle Edward and his Susan in their bright, peaceful room at Milnehill, in the evening calm and sweet comfort of that home life; and this young solitary, hurrying by himself through the dark streets of Harliflax, the wind flaring the street-lamps overhead, and a crowd of hurrying phantoms rushing through

the darkness of his mind, where the air was wild with the excitement of a storm, and lightning gleams of evil intention threw a fitful illumination. He went on, hurrying through the night, with a careless intuition that he was going to a death-bed. It was nothing to Horace. He was going to serve his own purposes, to see Amelia. His pulse beat high at last, with a rising exhilaration. In the changing tide of his thoughts he began to remember that fortune was secure to him, though not now, and he was going to see the first and only creature who had ever touched his selfish soul into passion. His spirit rose into a thrill of expectation and dark enjoyment. That inarticulate horror lay darkling still among his thoughts, but it did not disturb the rising flush of youthful elevation and hope.

The lawyer's house was lighted all over, but not with lights which could be mistaken for an illumination of pleasure. Even in so short a time the whole place had acquired a look of painful hurry and anxiety. The daughters and the servants were wandering

restlessly up and down the stairs, making ceasless inquiries, and keeping up a perpetual disturbance at the door of the sick-room, where Mrs. Stenhouse, restored to her due place, by the visitation of trouble, watched by her husband, and where even Amelia was not permitted to enter. Amelia was not very anxious for the privilege, it must be owned. She kept up a perpetual succession of messages, sending her sisters and her maid, and every half hour going herself to ask whether papa was any better?—whether there was any change?—with cheeks paled half by anxiety about her father, and half by fright and apprehension for herself; for the cholera had come to Harliflax, a dreaded visitor, some months before, and still made itself remembered in fatal droppings of poison, here and there a single "case" renewing in the public mind its original panic. The beauty was glad to escape from her fears and the troubled atmosphere of the house, into a burst of hurried conversation with Horace, who was not sentimental enough to require of her any great degree of devotion to her father, and did

not find it at all unsuitable to the agitated condition of the household that Amelia turned to himself so readily for occupation in her restless idleness. She swept down upon a little sofa, which was lost and disappeared under the covert of her ample skirts, and shaded her face with her hand, and declared that she was so unhappy she did not know what to do. "For it really is the cholera, Mr. Scarsdale," said Amelia; "and we may all be gone in a week, for anything any one can tell. Poor papa is so bad, it is dreadful to think of it! And I am sure, ever since I knew what it was, I have been in such a state! If you were to listen now, you could hear my heart beat."

"I am listening; but my ear is too far off," said Horace, with bold admiration. "I should like to study that sound at a less distance, if I might——"

"Oh! Mr. Scarsdale — if I were not so anxious and so agitated, I should be very angry," said Amelia. "Pray, go away, sir. You are a great deal too bold, you gentlemen. But to think of poor papa: quite well yesterday morning, and to-night—oh dear! oh dear!"

"Perhaps he is not so bad as you suppose," said Horace.

"He is a great deal worse than anybody supposes," cried Amelia, with a little sob. "Here, you—Harriet—Emma! Run up this moment, and knock at the door, and ask how dear papa is; whether there is any change. I am so afraid to hear there is any change; the words sound so dreadful—don't they, Mr. Scarsdale?—and when it is one's father! Oh! what a long time that child loiters. I must run myself! Wait just a moment, please."

And Amelia swept away, upsetting a chair in her progress, and almost puffing out one of the candles on the table by the current of air which attended her movements. She came back again a few minutes after, breathless, but walking with great solemnity.

"He is no better—there is no difference, Mr. Scarsdale," she said, with a great sigh, seating herself with the deepest seriousness, casting down her eyes, and shaking her head. Horace watched her through all this pantomime with glowing eyes. Not that he re-

marked or commented on the character which thus showed itself: he cared no more for Amelia's character than he did for her grandmother's; but from the splendid black hair wreathed round her head, to the little foot which came out from under her wide drapery, and upon which her own downcast eyes were fixed, the young man devoured her with his gaze of bold and selfish passion. He should have her yet, whoever might object: she should belong to him, whether she would or not. That was the pivot of his fancy; and all Amelia's pretty trickery was nothing to her thorough-going admirer, nor did he even feel himself reminded of his special errand here, or of the suffering man upon whom "as yet" —ominous words—there was no change!

Perhaps neither of the young people knew very well how long Horace remained in that deserted drawing-room, which had so strange an air of agitation to-night upon all its familiar aspects, and which, though nothing was changed, bore somehow so clear an impression of being no longer the centre of interest, but rather a forsaken corner out of

the current. After a while, however, the *tête-à-tête* was rudely interrupted by the staggering entrance of Mr. Stenhouse's man-of-all-work, carrying in his arms the invalid boy with whom Horace had made private acquaintance on his first visit here.

"Mr. Edmund's sent for up to master," said the man, confusedly, as he saw that his young mistress was there. "Beg your pardon, Miss Amelia; but I didn't know no one was here, and come in to rest—he's mortal heavy, for all he's so little," he continued, as he staggered out again, somewhat dismayed by his blunder. Miss Amelia was not the gentlest of rulers. Little Edmund, meanwhile, clung to his bearer's shoulder, with his suspicious eyes gleaming large and eager out of his little white child's face. Edmund was not the person to come and go without a word.

"I say, sir, you!" cried Edmund, "papa's ill. You're not to come a-courting, as Stevens says you all do, to-night. I won't have it—*I* won't! I'm papa's son, and when he's ill there shan't be strangers in the house!"

The end of this harangue was lost in the depths of the stairs, where Stevens had borne forth in alarm his dangerous charge. Amelia started, half rose, shook out her great skirts, and turned with graceful condescension to her lover.

"Don't mind that little savage, Mr. Scarsdale. But really I had quite forgotten that papa asked to see you; this has been such an agitating, anxious day. Pray call Stevens, and make him tell papa that you are here; and please," she continued, rising up suddenly, and laying her hand on Horace's arm, "please do let me know what he says to you. Oh, I'm sure it's about little Edmund—that little wretch is such a pet with papa, and it's so unfair to us. Will you?" she cried, with animation, making no resistance when Horace took and held her hand. "Will you really? Oh, do, there's a dear good—oh no, I did not mean that; I meant, there's a kind friend; now don't be foolish, Mr. Scarsdale; go up directly to papa."

"I will, because you tell me," said Horace; "for your sake—it would be hard to go on

any other argument; and when I promise to tell you what he says, promise that *you* will see me again."

"Oh, yes, yes," said Amelia, hurrying him to the door, with a little fright, adding piquancy to her gratified vanity. She had seen various people "in love," and was a little indifferent to the manifestations of that youthful delusion; but the eyes of Horace glowed upon her with no commonplace fervour. She was flattered, but she was a little afraid, even though she was not aware what black companion she had in the young man's dangerous heart.

CHAPTER VII.

WITHOUT any awe, or indeed much interest—with the indifference of a man absorbed in his own affairs, and the still more revolting carelessness of one who had begun to play in his dark thoughts with other human lives, and to find them obstacles in his way—Horace Scarsdale entered the sick room of his employer. Mr. Stenhouse lay, huddled among his pillows, in all the exhaustion of his terrible disease, shivering and blue beneath the load of coverings with which his attendants vainly endeavoured to restore vital warmth to his frame. He was not dying *yet*—he had still force enough to retain the dismal, anxious look into which that malady writhes and puckers the suffering face; but he had reached to that

condition of entire occupation with his own pangs, which sometimes happily, sometimes miserably, beguiles the departing soul out of the shrinkings of nature on the verge of death. The appearance of Horace, recalling him from that absorbing consciousness of pain, he perceived with all a sick man's impatience. He had got free of his thoughts by means of those bodily tortures through which he had just passed—and to feel himself brought back to the more delicate agony of heart and conscience, seemed an infliction of wanton cruelty to the sufferer. He turned aside his chilled and colourless face, and closed his eyes on the unwelcome apparition of the man he had himself desired to see. He did not desire to see him now, nor to return to the anxieties of a living man in contemplation of death. He was no longer at a sufficient distance from that event to be able to contemplate it. Almost in the river, he would rather have forgotten what these dark waters were, and be left at the present moment to himself and his pain.

But as Horace drew close to the bed, a

little cry of impatience from the sharp voice of little Edward, who was then being carried downstairs, startled the father. He was still open to the touch of human love and anxiety in that point. He opened his eyes instantly, and made a sign of recognition to the young man standing beside him. "Go away, let them all go—Mary, leave me," he said faintly; then louder, as Mrs. Stenhouse lingered timidly—"leave me, do you hear; I have something to say to him; go, I tell you, or it will be all the worse for your boy. Scarsdale," continued the sick man, watching with his anxious eyes his wife's figure disappearing, "come closer—no one is aware of it but you—sit down here."

Horace obeyed, bringing his ear near to the wavering voice. He was not sympathetic, and did not pretend it; he listened without a look or a word of pity, and the sufferer's spirit rallied into its wonted expression at the sight of his cold, business face.

"I've left everything to Edmund, if he lives," gasped the dying man; "here, Scarsdale, are you sure you hear me?—and about

that young Musgrave's concern, you know. I don't want the boy to hear of it; eh, do you understand?—I *had* nothing to do preserving Musgrave's interests; do you hear me?—the boy is not to know."

"I shall not tell him," said Horace, briefly.

"Tell him!—that is not enough. He is not to know. Do you hear me? The child's a Quixote. How can I tell what he would do? He is not to hear of it! And, Scarsdale," continued the sufferer, almost piteously, in a tone of deprecating cunning, "there's Amelia; she has a little fortune, and if she'll have you, I shan't object."

"No," said Horace, looking with his eyes still fiery in their excitement, and all the superiority and contempt of youth and health upon the dying man, whose will, twenty-four hours hence, would be impotent as the grave could make it. "No!" There was almost a smile upon his lip; it was cruel life exulting over the vain intentions of the dying. A few hours, and what would *his* objection signify? Undisguised and manifest, that thought rung in the mocking tone of the

young man's reply, and looked out of his uncompassionating face.

Perhaps the congenial spirit lying there felt it!—and knew his own impotence. He threw out his shivering hands in a gesture which might be appeal—which might be passion—which was actual physical agony, a paroxysm of returning pain. The wife and her assistants came back, and Horace stood aside from the bed, without the sufferer being aware of it. "Remember, Scarsdale, the boy is not to know!" he shouted out in the height of his sufferings. Horace remained in the room with a morbid curiosity strange to himself, though his eager thoughts were with Amelia below. He was not aware that few men depart in a paroxysm of pain, and he stood there with a strange excitement, almost thinking that, for the first time, he should see a fellow-creature die.

When those pangs subsided the sufferer was nearer the last act of life; a merciful haze and dimness of exhaustion had begun to creep over him. Through this mist he spoke faintly out of his wandering mind—

words only half audible, only half intelligible. One of these murmuring sounds was over and over repeated, until the watchers recognized it:—"In its mother's milk—in its mother's milk; seethe a kid in its mother's milk; Scarsdale!" said the dying man, opening his dim eyes with a sudden renewal of energy—"isn't it in the Bible so?—ah! the Bible, boy—you know!"

"Yes, Julius dear—yes!" cried poor weeping Mrs. Stenhouse, eager, poor soul, to thrust into his mind, even then, more hopeful words —"and a great deal more, and better, about the forgiveness of sins. Oh, Julius! let me read—you can hear me yet!"

"Oh! you are there, are you?" said Stenhouse, raising his eyes with an effort. "I thought it was Scarsdale—ha!—he's off to Amelia, is he? to court the girl when her father's dying? But I tell you, Scarsdale," cried the sufferer, raising his sharp voice high and ghastly in the stillness, "*the boy is not to know!*"

These were the last words Horace heard from the man who had crossed so actively, yet

so briefly, the current of his life. Warned by the unspoken appeal of Mrs. Stenhouse, and feeling that even decorum forbade him to remain, he left the room; nor had even he hardihood sufficient to linger long with Amelia, who awaited his return in the drawing-room. He told her a rapidly-invented fable as to what Mr. Stenhouse had said to him, and left the house almost immediately. His regard for ordinary proprieties was small enough, certainly; but he was not quite bold enough to come from the father's death-bed and make violent love to the daughter below. He postponed it for that night.

This episode turned the young man's thoughts back a little into a more familiar and less tragic current; and now that the lawyer's secret threatened to become known, Horace bethought himself of one way still remaining by which he might have, even although *nothing happened* at Marchmain, some benefit by his grandfather's will. That merciless document precluded the heir from availing himself of the aid of money-lenders, under penalty of losing the inheritance; and it was,

accordingly, vain to think of availing himself of the common resource of impatient heirs. Mr. Stenhouse dead, and Roger Musgrave's friends aroused to the first inklings of a discovery, Mr. Pouncet's character and credit, and no inconsiderable portion of his wealth, lay absolutely in the power of Horace. If he could exercise that power so as to procure such support as he felt himself entitled to from the unwilling lawyer, it might save him yet from the deadly, secret, and unexpressed impulse in his hidden mind. Something might happen at Marchmain, without any agency of the unnatural son. Was it a good angel which put the lesser sin of deceit before those covetous eyes, to guard them from the bigger sin which loomed darkly within their vision? Heaven knows: but, at least, the phantoms crowding round his bed that night were less hideous than the latent horror which still cowered darkling in a corner of his heart.

CHAPTER VIII.

"ARMITAGE is the most indolent man I know, Susan," said Colonel Sutherland; "here is his letter, my love, saying he has written to his attorney to make inquiries. And yet, after all, they're sharp these country lawyers—perhaps it was the best thing he could do; and here's—eh?—why, a letter from Horace! Come now, that's satisfactory—let us see what the boy says."

"What does he say, uncle?" asked Susan, when, after a considerable pause, and two readings of the letter, Uncle Edward carefully refolded it, laid it down by his own plate, and went on with his breakfast without another word.

"Oh, hum—nothing particular, my dear

child—nothing of any importance," said Colonel Sutherland, with a troubled face, opening the letter again and glancing over it; as if he might perhaps find out somewhere a key to the moral cipher in which it was written. He was slow to take offence; but its tone affronted the old soldier. There was a shade of mockery, visible even to Uncle Edward's earnest, unsuspicious eyes; and whether it was true, and Musgrave was to blame—or false, and a disgrace to Horace, there was equal pain in the alternative; in either case it was not for Susan's eyes.

"Uncle, has Horace been doing something very wrong?" asked Susan, after a little interval, with the moisture rising to her eyes. Colonel Sutherland made a little use of his infirmity at that moment. He bent his deaf ear towards her, asking, "What, my love?" as if he had neither heard nor could guess what her question was; and before she could speak again, made an exclamation of surprise over another letter, the postmark of which he was regarding curiously. "London! why, Susan, Musgrave has come home!"

And before the Colonel could assure himself of this unexpected event by a glance over his letter, a commotion was heard outside; Patchey intent upon showing into the drawing-room somebody who was equally intent upon finding his way direct to the Colonel's presence.

"Why, man, I have come all the way from the Cape to see him," burst at last upon their hearing, in a manly voice, somewhat loud, and full of exhilaration, from the hall. "I tell you, he'll give me some breakfast; the kindest friend I ever had in the world, do you think he'll refuse to see *me?*"

"The Colonel's a kind friend to many a person, but it's agin his principle to be disturbed at his meals," said Patchey, obstinately. "I'll tell him whenever the bell rings, but in the meanwhile you'll walk in *here.*"

And Patchey's pertinacity would have gained the day but for the interference of Colonel Sutherland, who got up hastily from the breakfast-table, with an exclamation very rare on his gentle lips, and threw

open as wide as it would go the door of the dining-room. There outside stood Roger Musgrave, brown and manful, in his dark Rifleman's uniform, and restored to such a degree of self-confidence and social courage as became a man who had been living among his equals for a couple of years, who had earned his place, and made himself a modest degree of fame. He grasped the Colonel's hands in his own with an exuberant satisfaction, which the poor Squire of Tillington's penniless heir would not have ventured upon. He came in boldly, overflowing with honest gratitude and pleasure, secure of finding his place, and delighted to be "at home" once more. But Roger was suddenly interrupted, and struck dumb in his jubilant and rapid account of having been sent home with dispatches, and arriving suddenly without due time to warn his old friend of his approach. Susan rose from her place by the breakfast-table, and the young man lost his head and his tongue in an instant, scared by that formidable apparition. After a minute's interval, turning very red, and stammering out,

"Miss Scarsdale?" Roger shyly approached the unlooked-for mistress of the house; while Susan on her part, with an equal blush, and a faltering exclamation of "Mr. Musgrave!" made an imperceptible step of advance, and gave her hand to Uncle Edward's "young friend." Uncle Edward himself, much amazed and amused by this pantomime, looked on till it was over. Then he covered the embarrassment of the young people in his own fashion by innumerable questions, which Roger was only too glad to answer; but Susan, mortified and troubled, and finding herself sadly in the way, could not but perceive that her presence was an effectual damp upon the stranger's high spirits, and had subdued him in the strangest fashion. How could it be? Susan took the earliest opportunity of leaving the room, dismayed at the influence she had unconsciously exercised, and more than half disposed to run upstairs to her own room and have a good cry over it. She had imagined to herself, perhaps, more than once, what might happen at this very arrival

—but her thoughts had never pictured any such scene as this.

When Susan had left the room, however, Roger's silence and diffidence, instead of lessening, rather increased; he followed her to the door with his eyes, and made a confused pause; and then he burst into the very middle of a little lecture upon strategy which the good Colonel was delivering to him, with the very inconsequent and illogical remark:—

"I was quite taken by surprise to see Miss Scarsdale here."

"Why," said Colonel Sutherland, swallowing the affront to his own eloquence, "you knew Susan was my niece, did you not?"

"I—I suppose I had forgotten," said Roger, with another blush over this inexcusable fib. And as the young man seemed disposed to make another pause after this false statement, and to fall into a state of reverie, the Colonel bethought himself of applying the sharp spur of Horace's letter to bring him to himself.

"I would have delayed for a little speaking to you so gravely," said Uncle Edward; "but

as we are talking of Miss Scarsdale, it is just as well to enter upon the subject at once. Now, remember, I don't want to steal into your confidence, or urge you to tell anything you may wish to conceal; but let me know this much, Musgrave. When you left Tillington did you leave anything behind you; any foolish connexion, any boyish entanglement, anything you wished to conceal? My dear boy, I don't want to make myself your judge —such things have been, and have been repented of—only tell me, 'yes' or 'no'?"

"Foolish connexion!—boyish entanglement!" repeated Roger, in amazement; "I know *you* don't mean to insult me, Colonel Sutherland—what do you mean?"

The old man looked into the young man's face, bending towards him with that stoop of benign weakness—the touch of physical imperfection, which put a tender climax to his fatherly words and ways.

"I will tell you what I mean by-and-bye; but in the meantime say to me in so many words—'It is not true.'"

"It is not true!" said Roger, with emphasis.

The young man was certainly roused now—he sat quite upright, carrying high his soldierly head, not defiant as he might have been at Tillington, perfectly grave, conscious of nothing which slander could build upon. The old soldier's eyes glistened over him—he was proud of his volunteer.

"I knew it all along," said Colonel Sutherland, joyfully; "but to know you perfectly right, as I always believed, is not so much pleasure to me as it might be, since it proves somebody else entirely wrong. I'll tell you now how this came about. Susan on her way here overheard part of a conversation between her brother and an old man, in which your name was introduced, and mention made of a pension which the man thought you might be induced to give him, in consequence of some discovery. This Horace forbade his sister to repeat, but Susan told me, thinking there was something wrong at the bottom. You will forgive me, Musgrave, if the idea glanced into my mind for a moment that there might be something to conceal. With that idea, thinking to appeal to my nephew's generosity,

I wrote to him, and this is the answer; see—I am assured now that there is something of importance to your interests beneath this veil."

Roger read the letter with a rising colour; he saw the trick of it, and had hard enough ado to restrain his impatience.

"He is brother—I mean he is your nephew, Colonel Sutherland," he said, returning the letter with a somewhat proud gesture. He thought of nothing else in his sublime, youthful contempt for this effort to dishonour him; he was innocent, and his veins tingled with momentary rage, proudly subdued; but he gave no second thought to the discovery, or to the something important and secret which this impotent slander had concealed.

However, the Colonel proceeded to question him upon the condition of his relation's estate, and the chances there might be of some discovery of consequence. Roger answered at random, being very ignorant, quite hopeless of any good, and otherwise occupied in his mind. The old soldier was at last compelled to break up the conference from manifest signs of impatience on the part of his guest, who was

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anxious to go to his room and refresh himself after his journey. When Roger had really got his release, however, and was on his way to the door, the young man came back again with another inconsequent question :—

"May I ask, Colonel Sutherland, if Miss Scarsdale was aware of this—of your suspicions?" he said, fumbling wrathfully with the handle of his travelling-bag.

"Certainly not—not a word," said Uncle Edward, gravely; and while the young man went away relieved, the old one mused in his chair, with a little humour in his smile. "I wonder, now, what it mattered if she had?" he said to himself; "they never exchanged three words in their lives." That was very true; but there are more things than words in the world when people are young.

CHAPTER IX.

When Susan and Roger met again late in the day they had somewhat changed conditions. Lieutenant Musgrave—for that was now the rank of the young volunteer—had, to his own pleasurable consciousness, improved his personal appearance during his hour of seclusion. Though he was rather too tall for a rifleman, that excess of stature is a drawback easily sustained in general by those afflicted with it; and perhaps Roger had a little satisfaction in thinking that the dress became him tolerably well, in spite of his inches. It is to be feared that the thought did glance into his mind as he finished his toilette, that his own was such a figure as might catch a lady's eye, especially while the placid firmament of Milnehill was

disturbed by no apparition of a rival knight; and that the likelihood of spending some days under the same roof with Susan was, when he realized it, rather exhilarating to the young man's spirits. Susan, however, was in a very different position. She had seen what she supposed to be a sudden chill of discomfort fall upon the stranger at sight of her. She had observed his silence, his fallen looks, his diminished brightness, and it was impossible to attribute this change to anything but her own presence. Susan was very much mortified by this supposed discovery. She had known herself to be unregarded and unloved for the most part of her life, but never before had she felt herself *in the way;* and the result was that a sentiment of injury, melancholy and heroical, arose in Susan's heart. She was sad and dignified, when Roger appeared full of animation, and anxious to please. She thought he had recovered the first shock of seeing her, and was training himself into friendly behaviour; and she repulsed him as much as she could by her monosyllables and downcast eyes. After a little, he began to

grow puzzled: he could not rouse her to interest, though he exerted all his powers; she was dull, saddened, and pre-occupied. Perhaps, after all, there *were* rivals to disturb the peaceable atmosphere at Milnehill.

Uncle Edward, who observed the two with quiet interest, and a little mingling of amusement, beheld the shadow, and was puzzled in his turn; for Susan hitherto had shown no lack of interest in Musgrave's affairs. Colonel Sutherland's anxiety, however, relieved itself by the instant despatch of Patchey with a note to the Colonel's dear friend and ally, Mrs. Melrose, his sister-in-law, who was now his referee on all feminine topics. The tender-hearted old man concluded that Susan might possibly feel her position somewhat uncomfortable as hostess to the stranger, "especially if she likes him," thought Uncle Edward; and, obedient to his summons, an hour or more before dinner arrived a Portobello "noddy," containing Mrs. Melrose, her pretty maid, and her best cap. The old lady was almost as much disposed to make a pet of Susan as was Susan's uncle, and the reproof

which she administered to his solicitude was of the lightest.

"Here I am, Edward, you perceive," said his old friend; "but why I should be sent for at this express rate is more than a quiet person like me can divine. Because Susan feels awkward at having a young man to entertain, and no other woman in the house? Nonsense! Susan is just the last girl in the world to be so foolish. What's a young man more than any other person? It's your punctilios, Edward, that put things into the bairns' heads; but I'm here, for all that. If the truth must be told, I am growing very fond of that young creature myself."

"I am very glad to hear it," said Colonel Sutherland, conducting that short, bright, pleasant figure most carefully and gallantly through the garden; for Mrs. Melrose was older than the Colonel, and owned to a good many infirmities, and had almost given up walking by this time. Then he began to recommend Roger very specially to her notice; and then he had to hear Mrs. Melrose's news; that the mail which came in yesterday had

brought a joint letter from Charlie and his wife, and that the regiment was ordered to Outerabad, "where we were when my poor General got his first step," said the old lady. "I hope it will be as fortunate with his son," answered Uncle Edward; and so they entered the house, to receive Susan's glad, astonished welcome. The advent of Mrs. Melrose almost delivered Susan from that rare fit of romantic and heroical sullenness. There was no necessity *now* for Mr. Musgrave being specially civil to herself. Now she had some one to talk to, to release "the gentlemen" from the imperative claims of politeness. She seized upon the old lady with all the fervour of pique, resolved to show Roger that if she was in *his* way, he was an object of great indifference to *her*; and succeeded so well in this laudable attempt, that before the two ladies left the dining-room poor Roger was as *distrait* and silent as ever. Susan's cruel experiment, like the surprise of her first appearance, had puffed him out.

"But, my dear boy," said Colonel Sutherland, "you must do something in this matter.

I wrote to Armitage about it, but, considering how he managed matters when you went, I can't say I have much confidence in him. And he is not married yet, the poor old sinner! My nephew, Musgrave, is—my nephew, as you said to-day, but I don't know the boy at all. I don't understand him, and therefore I don't know what to think of this concealed matter, which evidently concerns yourself, whatever it is."

Roger made no answer. He had not a vestige of belief in his heart that anything could be found out to his benefit, and he was consequently careless of it.

"What I should recommend you to do," continued the Colonel, "would be to go at once to Kenlisle, to see this lawyer whom Sir John has written to, Mr. Pouncet. Most likely he had the management of your godfather's affairs as well—and urge him to take all possible steps for hunting out the mystery."

"The mystery!" cried Roger, with a momentary impatience; "I beg your pardon, Colonel, but what possible mystery can there

be about such a history as ours in these days? My dear, good, excellent old godfather, my tenderest of friends and benefactors," said the young man warmly, reddening with that deep consciousness of blame cast upon the dead, which made his language more fervent than was any way needful—"was an old-fashioned country gentleman, and lived to the full extent of his means. Why should not he?—he had no children to provide for. It is so usual a story, that any county in England could match it. He had a liberal hand while he lived, and when he died nothing was left. What possible mystery, what concealment or secret, could be here?"

"I cannot tell, indeed," said the Colonel; "but on the other hand, what possible reason could induce Horace Scarsdale, who is penniless himself, to promise a pension to a countryman of the district in your name, for the sake of some discovery connected with you?"

Roger mused over this an instant with a troubled face.

"Perhaps," he said at last slowly, not so much in pique as might have been supposed,

but slightly inclining that way, with visions of unknown rivals crowding darkly before his eyes, "perhaps—I never wrote to ask if I should be welcome—perhaps while Miss Scarsdale is here—"

"Miss Scarsdale has nothing whatever to do with the subject. Why, Musgrave, man!" cried the Colonel, "what is the use of bringing Susan in? Susan is as my own child in my own house; think of your own interests, my dear young fellow, and leave Susan alone, though she *is* a very good girl."

"A very good girl!" repeated Roger; "then you don't mind us being together sometimes, Colonel, if she pleases," added, with a blushing burst of frankness, the self-convicted lover.

The Colonel shook his head. "Oh, young fools, young fools!" groaned, not from the depths, but only from the surface of his heart, that bewildered veteran; "what's to come of your being sometimes together? Not much increase to your purse, Musgrave, nor advantage to either of you. If you have begun to entertain such fantastic thoughts, your

best plan is to think over what I am saying. There must be something, depend upon it, worth hearing, before my clever nephew, Horace, could make up his mind to offer an old countryman such a stipend as six-and-twenty pounds a-year."

"Ah!" cried Roger; the young man was struck with momentary conviction, partly by the fact and partly by the argument. He made a hasty memorandum in his own mind, that he would certainly look into it; but his thoughts at the present moment did not very well bear such an interruption. "It looks as if there must be something in it; but, Colonel, won't you postpone it till later?" he said, in a deprecatory tone; "I think, by this time, we ought to join the ladies. They'll blame me already for detaining you. I know you never sit long over your wine."

Once more the Colonel shook his head, but this time he smiled. He found the young man's behaviour altogether so natural, that he could not criticize it severely; and perhaps, having once been young himself, was all the better pleased with Roger, that the youth had

heart enough to be shaken entirely off his balance by this deepest of disturbing influences. They went across the hall together into the drawing-room, where Susan sat by the side of Mrs. Melrose, hearing the old lady's stories. She had many a story in her mind that cheerful mother—a mother in everything, though she had but one child — many an exciting drama of life and sad domestic tragedy, brought out under yonder burning Eastern skies, lay within her memory; but it was not one of these to which Susan listened. It was to an account of Mrs. Melrose's Indian establishment, when she lived at Outerabad, "where my poor General got his first step," and where her son Charlie was now going. That practical and homely tale pleased Susan. She liked to hear of the economics of the young subaltern's wife; how she managed to do without superfluous servants, and strenuously laboured at the mending of that strange little hole in the purse through which their money seemed always running. Her contrivances about dress, when she and her lieutenant had an invitation to the Colonel's bungalow to dinner; the thrift

with which this capable woman had managed that strange, half-savage, yet highly artificial and civilized household, with all its Anglo-Indian wants and luxuries. Susan was never tired of that long prolonged story, which always unfolded some new episode: "Did I ever tell you about so-and-so?" said the old lady, and forthwith ran into a variation which enlivened and animated the original strain. Susan was a capable woman, too, though she had not yet much tried her powers. She enjoyed hearing of these wonderful thrifts, and labours, and victories, as boys love stories of shipwrecks and hairbreadth escapes. "What I should have done myself!" ran through the whole like a golden thread. It roused Susan's spirits and her heart—it was to her like the reading of a possible future, instead of a certain past. She did not think of the things dolorous and heavy which cheerful Mrs. Melrose dwelt on little. She did not pause to remember that the heroine of all that active existence was now an infirm old lady, dwelling alone. Susan only thought of the life, and the love, and the labour; the capable hands, the cheerful heart,

the years and hours so well filled and liberal. The fashion of that existence charmed her congenial thoughts.

"For you see," said Mrs. Melrose, after a long chapter of that history, which she meant to make an end of as soon as the gentlemen entered the room, "you see, Susan, we were poor then, the General and me."

"But you were happy all the same, happier than if you had waited till you were rich," cried Roger Musgrave, suddenly, in her ear.

"Happy!" cried the old lady, turning round upon him with an echo not to be described by words in her voice. Then she paused, with a humorous smile on her face; "I'm an old woman, and should be a good adviser; but I never was a good adviser, as your Uncle Edward will tell you. Now everybody knows that when two young fools marry upon nothing, it's not only one of the greatest follies the world is acquainted with, but *exceedingly wrong.*"

Mrs. Melrose pronounced these words with great unction and emphasis. Could anybody doubt that she believed them thoroughly?

But there was meanwhile a suspicious twinkle in her bright old eyes.

"And yet General Melrose was only a lieutenant," said Roger, "when—"

"When I married him, blessings on him!" cried the old lady, "he was but an ensign—that I should dare say so before young people!—but you can make an example and a beacon of me, Susan, my dear. Yes, it was years and years long before he was *General* Melrose, Mr. Musgrave; such years! years of trouble and toil and misery and happiness. Ah! Edward, they're gone and past, these years! Nothing but one thing will happen now to you and me, and that, please God, will give us back to them all."

To them all! There was a silence in the room after these words. Tears sprang to the eyes of the young people in that tender, pitiful youth of theirs, which could not understand how to be content without happiness; but there were no tears in the old eyes which met in such a pathetic cheerful glance, and understood each other beyond all interpretation of words. Dear life, which they could

still live cheerfully, all shorn and diminished as it was, for His sake who gave it, and out of the most natural humanity of their Christian hearts!—but dearer was the end and termination, the day of that holy death which should restore *them all.*

But the evening was not sad after that, as a vulgar fancy might suppose. The old people were very cheerful, brighter than youth itself in the serenity of their old age; and Mrs. Melrose, who had been considered a very clever woman all her life by half the Indian service, and who had more actual humour and appreciation of the same than all her three auditors put together, kept Roger and Susan breathless with her recollections, her anecdotes, her sallies of quiet fun. She consented to stay all night, at her brother-in-law's request and Susan's anxious entreaty, and took Roger entirely under her protection, and treated him "like a boy of her own." "But I cannot understand," said the old lady reprovingly, as she bade her brother good night, "when you spoke of Susan and her delicacies, why you did not say there was any-

thing particular in the business, or that this was not any person, but the special young man."

Was it the special young man?—the true knight? Susan asked herself no questions on the subject, but made great haste to get to bed and avoid speculation, which, seeing it was after twelve o'clock, a very late hour for. Milnehill, was doubtless the most sensible thing she could have done.

CHAPTER X.

WHILE Roger Musgrave travelled full of hope and pleasant anticipation towards Milnehill, Roger's mother had been mourning over her dead husband. And now, while that happy evening party gathered in Colonel Sutherland's drawing-room, the widow and her little boy were spending the slow hours together in the warm parlour, where Edmund spent his invalid childhood. His father's death had given a shock more than it could bear to the nervous and weakly frame of the ailing child; his father was dead, and he was the heir. An unnatural excitement stimulated the precocious little mind, and rose to fever in the throbbing pulse and little pinched cheeks, now flushed with a hectic brightness. The little fellow had

visions too magnificent to be safe, and projects as wild and impossible, as they were childish and simple-hearted. After the first pangs of his childish grief were over, Edmund, who knew nothing about guardians nor minority, began to speculate splendidly what he should do with his new wealth. He poured into his mother's ears a flood of intentions, vain, lavish, childish dreams of universal help. He was to send for Roger and give the greater half of all he had to his elder brother; he was to get everything she could desire for Mrs. Stenhouse; he was to send a present of the most beautiful horse in the world to Colonel Sutherland; and henceforward they were all to live together, and "my brother Roger" was to be supreme in the joint household. Mrs. Stenhouse, afraid to check him, and at the same time trembling for the effect of this excitement upon his weak frame, looked on with a troubled heart. She knew Edmund would not get his wild will *now*, as he supposed he should. She knew very well that nobody would permit him to do a tenth part of what he meant to do. But when he roused himself

up out of his chair with that light of pleasure on his face, and that hectic flush which she persuaded herself into supposing "a healthy colour," and amused the languor of his lonely days with these imperative fancies, what could the poor woman do who had been his bondwoman and servant so long? And then she was full of sorrowful thoughts about "his dear father," as Mrs. Stenhouse now called the careless partner of her life, mourning him as many a man is mourned who does little to deserve that remorseful tribute of late affection. Now that he was gone, she thought it must have been her own fault that they did not get on better; and it grieved her to find how impossible it was to check Edmund into sadness, and to make him feel that the loss of his father was a matter far more important than his supposed mastery of his father's wealth. Edmund had cried all his tears out the first day, and had no more lamentations to make.

"What do you cry for?" he exclaimed at last, impatiently; "aren't you glad to send for Roger, and have him at home? I shouldn't

wonder if he'd join the Edgehill Cricket-club, and get to be captain of the eleven—wouldn't it be famous. And I mean to get strong, *I* can tell you, mamma. I don't mean to live in this stifle and coddle, now I've come into my fortune; for papa said it was all for me."

"Oh, Edmund, dear child, your father was so fond of you!" cried the poor mother; "have you no thought to spare for him, now that he is gone? He loved you more than everything in the world. I wish—I wish you would think more of him than of what he leaves behind."

Little Edmund looked up keenly at the weak, weeping, timid woman.

"Were you fond of him yourself?" said the child, half suspiciously; "now you love him and cry about him; but it is different with me. He was very good to me, was papa," continued the little man, with a reluctant tear in the corner of his eye; "but all of you say he's a deal better off now, and that we'll see him again. If that's true, why do you cry?—and besides, mamma, I used always to think that you liked Roger's father best."

Mrs. Stenhouse covered her face with her hands, and only cried the more; she was vexed, humiliated, and ashamed, as well as full of grief. It seemed somehow sacrilege to speak of Roger's father to the son of her second husband; and Roger's father was little to herself now but a bright, brief dream of her girlhood, too short, too happy to influence her life. Now the second, longer, harder, more serious portion of her existence had concluded also; but while she sat crying these tears of mortification and wounded feeling, some one beckoned her to the door of the room and gave her some letters. One of these was from Roger himself, announcing his arrival, and that he had gone to Milnehill; for Roger as yet did not know what had happened in his mother's house. This surprising announcement raised her out of her distress in a moment and dried her tears. A thrill of new freedom ran warm through her heart, stirring the blood in her dull veins. Roger, her first-born, whom she had not seen since he was almost a baby—whom Mr. Stenhouse smilingly disliked, and would not permit to

come there—Roger, her brave soldier, her handsome boy! Now she could have him under her own roof, without asking anybody's permission; now she could enjoy her son's society in fullest freedom. Poor soul! it gave her a compunction to feel how glad she was; but she could not deny even to herself how exquisite for the first moment was that unaccustomed delight.

"Oh, Edmund, darling, look here!" cried poor Mrs. Stenhouse, crying again, but this time with joy; "Roger has come home—*your brother*, my love;" and with an outcry of mingled terror, compunction, and delight, to feel herself daring enough in this house to pronounce these words aloud, Mrs. Stenhouse thrust the letter into Edmund's hands, and relapsed once more into tears.

Her other letters had fallen on the floor at her feet. When Edmund had finished Roger's, his inextinguishable childish curiosity discovered these. His mother was still crying, and he was her lord and master, the autocrat acknowledged and apparent of the house; he slid out of the easy chair as a cripple slides,

and snatched up the nearest. Though it was addressed to Julius Stenhouse, Esq., the arrogant little imp did not hesitate to tear it open; but he did it with some haste, to make sure of the epistle before his mother uncovered her eyes. It was a communication somewhat puzzling to brains so young. Edmund, though his pride would not acknowledge it even to himself, did not understand half of Mr. Pouncet's letter, but he gleaned enough out of it to know that something that concerned Roger had been a subject of importance likewise to his father and his father's friend; and that the writer of the present epistle, which had, it appeared, been delayed in the transmission, was in a state of considerable alarm and trepidation about something. What it was that Mr. Pouncet feared Edmund could not make out, but he jumped at the conclusion that something was wrong as rapidly as Susan had done. Afraid!—why should a man be afraid?—Roger wasn't. Roger was the epitome of Edmund's faith. He had been badly educated, this poor child. He knew very little in heaven or earth save

his prayers and Roger, and trusted in nothing as he did in that unknown, never-to-be-acknowledged, secret, invisible brother, whom his mother told him of in whispers, and whom he thought of by day and dreamt of by night. Now glorious times were coming. Papa and this other man, whose letter rather baffled Edmund, had doubtless entertained some project of keeping Roger down; but behold the tables were turned, the conspirators were cheated, and the details of the complot had fallen into the hands of Roger's little knight and defender. True, he did not understand them very well, but still they were here.

"Roger shall come home directly," said the little despot, waving aloft in his hand these two epistles. "I'll give him half of all my money, mamma. He shan't go for a soldier any more; and I'll find out if anybody wants to do him any harm, and punish them, I will! Look here; it's something about Roger, but I don't quite know every word what it means. *You* can't tell any more than me. I say, mamma, let's have Scarsdale here, and ask *him*."

"What is it, love?" asked Mrs. Scarsdale, wiping her eyes.

"I wish you'd mind what one says," cried the impatient little invalid. "I told you I didn't know quite all it means, neither could you if you was to try. Mamma, ring the bell and send for Scarsdale—he's got no master now but you and me; send and tell him I want him, and he's to come directly. Mamma, do you hear?"

And when Mrs. Stenhouse had glanced over the letter, which she did understand rather better than Edmund after all, she thought the boy's suggestion wise. She had not the smallest gleam of discrimination in respect to character, and to be Colonel Sutherland's nephew was enough to give her a blind confidence in Horace; and as to the possibility of acting for herself, that did not enter into the poor woman's head. She sent for Scarsdale accordingly, not in little Edmund's imperative mood, but with a pleading message that Mr. Scarsdale would be so *very* good as to come to her as soon as it was *quite* convenient for him, as she was so

anxious to consult him about a letter she had received. Her heart beat higher in her breast that day with a deeper individual throb than it had known for many a previous year; a little flutter of tumultuous independence was in her mind; she would receive Roger into her own house unreproved; she seemed on the very eve of finding out something which might be of service to that cherished but unknown son; and her whole nature was stimulated by these unaccustomed hopes.

CHAPTER XI.

In Mr. Stenhouse's office, where affairs were being wound up, Horace Scarsdale held his clerk's place in greater personal discomfiture than he had ever previously known. Mr. Stenhouse's executors knew of nothing extraordinary in the position of this young man. His mysterious prospects were totally unknown to them, and he had no secret to hold over *their* heads and enforce his claims withal. To them he was only the newest and least acquainted of the lawyer's clerks, and nobody cared for his black looks and assumptions of superiority. He remained reluctantly at his desk, because he could not afford, in present circumstances, to sacrifice the salary which would shortly be paid to

him, nor could he make up his mind, in spite of all the dark excitements which distracted him—the fascination of enmity and evil purpose which bound him to Marchmain, and the covetous and tyrannous impulse which placed so plainly before his eyes his power over Mr. Pouncet—to leave the place which contained Amelia, and where alone he had any likelihood of seeing her. After their last interview the lover was daring enough to have stood upon small punctilio at the next meeting. But Mrs. Stenhouse's door was still decorously closed, and Stevens, at the present moment much more disposed to take Master Edmund for the tyrant of the house than Miss Amelia, was inexorable, and gave no admission. Mrs. Stenhouse's message accordingly found the young man in a propitious mood. He made haste to obey it, extremely indifferent as to the subject of the consultation, but deeply excited with the more personal emotion of once more finding himself under the same roof with the lady of his love.

Mrs. Stenhouse would willingly have seen

him alone, feeling instinctively that little Edmund's interference was not quite expedient here; but she had submitted her inclinations too long to that small autocrat to have any chance of freedom now. It was accordingly into Edmund's parlour that Horace was shown. There was still a fire warming into a state of semi-suffocation that invalid chamber; and there sat the child, consciously regnant and despotic, with his eager eyes blazing out of his sharp little face, and the hectic flush upon his cheeks. The mother watching always, to whom Edmund's illness had become quite a domestic institution, a thing which should last for ever, saw no change save of improvement; but the cold stranger's eye saw differently. The little blade was wearing out its tiny sheath—all this excitement was too much for the feeble little body; and as distinctly as the doctor, highly skilled and richly feed, who should come down from town after awhile to pronounce the child's death-sentence, Horace perceived that before he could do one of the splendid things he purposed, little Edmund, like a shadow, should have faded away.

But Horace thought no more of Edmund when he cast his eyes upon the letter which Mrs. Stenhouse hurriedly and with agitation put into his hand: —

"DEAR STENHOUSE—I wish fervently I had broken my leg or taken a fever on that unlucky day when I was persuaded into that Tinwold business of the coal-pits. I have never had a moment's repose or comfort since, and from the day that young Scarsdale poked his inquisitive nose into the business everything vexatious in life has clustered about this unfortunate affair. I do not deny that it has paid very well as a speculation, but the profit twice over would not have paid for the annoyance which first and last it has caused to me. This morning I have a letter from Sir John Armitage. It has oozed out, somehow or other, through young Scarsdale doubtless, that there is an old man somewhere in the district who knows some secret worth telling about young Musgrave. It is true, they have not an idea what it is, but Sir John charges me with the duty of searching it out and 'doing the boy justice.' Armitage of Armi-

tage Park, my father's clients before mine—one of the oldest families in the county! I know his affairs better than he does himself; and he dares not cut down a tree on his estate without consulting me; yet he breaks forth upon me as peremptory and absolute about this miserable business as if I could set it all square in a day. It is all very well for you, you are out of the way; you are never appealed to; the Musgraves never cross your path; but I am aggravated entirely out of patience. Would to heaven that I had never heard of your scientific friend and his discoveries! Such an accident is misery to a man of character, and if ever man was thrust and jostled into temptation that man was me.

"My temper has been so tried with this unhappy business, that I scarcely know what I am doing. Advise me how to answer Armitage, and send me Scarsdale if you can spare him. I want some assistance besides my own head and hands.

"O. POUNCET."

"Now, I say, mamma," cried Edmund, in a loud whisper, "don't give him time to make

up a story—ask him what it means. Oh, Mr. Scarsdale, we're very surprised about that, we are. It's something about Roger—what is it?"

Horace was taken by surprise. Looking up, he caught the child's sharp glance, and the imploring look of the mother, both fixed upon him; and he was disconcerted. Not for the last injunction of Edmund's father—not because that worldly man, without repenting of the wrong, would have suffered another death rather than allow this secret to be known to his child. Horace had given no promise, and thought no more of that last adjuration; but what was to become of the secret if he shared it with a woman and a child?—the woman Roger's mother, the child his earnest champion. And they already knew so much of it, without any aid of his. He faced round upon them, ready to defend this fancied talisman of his power.

"What reason have you to suppose that I was in Mr. Stenhouse's secrets?" said Horace. "I had not been a fortnight in his employment. I had not known him above a month

when he died. Was he likely to be confidential with me? Surely you know him better than to imagine anything so foolish."

"Ah, Mr. Scarsdale," cried Mrs. Stenhouse, trembling all over, and with tears which almost choked her—tears of anxiety for her son, and distress for her husband, mingled yet antagonistic; "he sent for you on his deathbed; there was something—something—God forgive me if I disregard this last wish of his! but it is for my Roger's sake—there was something that you were not to tell the boy."

"And is that the argument you use—you his widow!" cried Horace, with a sneer; "to induce me, a man of honour, just a week after, to *tell* the boy? That may be a woman's argument, Mrs. Stenhouse, but—"

"You hold your tongue, Scarsdale!" shouted little Edmund; "nobody shan't bully mamma. And I should like to know why I'm not to be told—me! I'm my father's heir, and I ought to know everything; and if you think me a child, it's because you don't know. Look here! I'm going to give half my money to Roger; but you shall marry Amelia, and

have the half of my share, if you tell me honest what it is."

Horace rose up with a laugh of ridicule at the child's folly, but before he could reach the door Mrs. Stenhouse came before him. "There's some sad mystery here," she said, wringing her hands; "Edmund was not to know I heard him say; and then about seething the kid in his mother's milk. It's something that will harm my Roger! What is it, Mr. Scarsdale? I charge you, as you had a mother yourself, to tell *me!*"

"I never had a mother myself," said Horace, with his cold smile; "and if Mr. Stenhouse was a good step-father to Roger Musgrave, and took care of his property that the poor boy might not waste it, what was that to me? I can't tell you—how can you suppose that I know?"

While he was speaking he made his way steadily to the door. He was pleased to go out and close it after him, leaving that reflection with the mother and child; that to be sure the dead man, their nearest relative, had defrauded his wife's son; what was that to

Horace Scarsdale? He went crushing Mr. Pouncet's letter in his hand; he had got possession of that, at all events, and he felt sure that poor trembling Mrs. Stenhouse could not make much of its hints, even though coupled with her husband's death-bed adjuration, and that strange maundering of his weakness, at which Horace smiled—seething the kid in its mother's milk. Unlikely words to enter the mind of that hard, unrepentant man of the world, who, even at his last moments, wished not to amend but to conceal.

But he had not seen Amelia; it was hard to reconcile the contrary accidents of his fate. He could not deceive them blandly, as Mr. Stenhouse could have done, and he had no resource but to go away with abruptness, losing all chance of future admittance to the feet of the beauty, who was now Mrs. Stenhouse's daughter, dependent upon her, and not the caressed and flattered mistress of the house. The cholera and the fright had unmanned Amelia. She had not been able to strike in at the proper moment and assert her sway; so that in the stillness of the house of mourning

her mother and Edmund had unconsciously and tacitly won the supremacy. Fortune, however, gave him the advantage he had forfeited by legitimate means. He met the lady of his heart that very same afternoon, as she took languidly a solemn walk with her sisters, all crape and propriety. Amelia was sadly tired of decorum by this time—decorum which lasts so much longer than grief, and is so exacting and punctilious. Though she put down her veil, her heart fluttered at the approach of Horace; and she was quite well pleased that he should turn with her, and accompany her back almost to the door of the house. He told her of his magnificent prospects, as he had never yet told any one; that when his father died he could make a very fine lady of her, and give her a house in town, and all the unhoped for delights of fashion; but that might be years hence—and in the meantime would she marry him? Amelia was too wise to say yes without due consideration; but she blushed through her veil, and was quite sure Mr. Scarsdale would give her a little time to think—would not be too urgent in the sad,

sad position of the family. How *could* she think of such things, and dear papa only a week in his grave? and some bright tears fell, easily shed. Horace was abundantly satisfied. He had excited her fancy with his hopes of fortune; and he thought she liked him, as it is so easy for people to believe; though in reality it was only the amusement, the admiration that Amelia cared for; and he wanted no more at the present moment. He said farewell, like an accepted lover, and went away jubilant; his dark purposes swelling in him, and a whole world of pleasure, wealth, and exaltation lying before him. A whole world, and only one dark, melancholy, unlovely shadow of life—a ghost alien to the sunshine, an unenjoying, unloving, dismal human thread of existence—hanging black between him and his enchanted kingdom. Accidents are rife and many in this troublous world — who could tell what might cut that thread?

CHAPTER XII.

With Mr. Pouncet's letter in his pocket—that self-betraying document, which he had estimated at once at its due value—Horace set out the next day for Kenlisle. Yet not for Kenlisle direct: the young man, with the oddest, uncharacteristic trifling, stopped halfway, to visit a remarkable cathedral town which lay in his road. What did Horace Scarsdale care for cathedrals? Yet he paused, in that most anxious and exciting moment, to inspect this one, and marched doggedly round and about it, as if to persuade himself that he was interested. In his progress he paused before an apothecary's shop—but did not enter there, nor till hours after, when he

rushed in on his way to the railway, and made certain purchases. In haste to get his train, he did not permit himself time to look at the things he had bought, but hurried them into his pocket, and rushed on again as though it had been only a sudden thought which moved him. Yet he had never looked so darkly pale and dangerous as when, seated in the railway-carriage, he felt in his pockets these little sealed packets. That day was a May-day, warm and bright; but Horace shivered in his corner with a chill that went to his heart. For a moment the colour went out of his face, and the light out of his eye; he gave a stealthy glance round—a glance full of the intolerable terrors of guilt. Did any one guess what he had in his pocket? Could any one tell what he had in his heart?

The next morning he presented himself to the troubled eyes of Mr. Pouncet, an image of conscious power. That unfortunate man of character knew by this time of the death of Stenhouse, and had spent a day or two of agony wondering into whose hands his letter was likely to fall. The advent of Horace was

a relief for the moment: here he had, at least, an assistant, who could do any further lying that might be necessary, without burdening Mr. Pouncet's personal conscience. That was a great point gained. But the answer to his first eager question was far from satisfactory.

"Your letter was put into my hands by Mrs. Stenhouse," said Horace; "and you know who she is—Roger Musgrave's mother."

Mr. Pouncet scratched his head in dismay. "She could not understand two words of it!" he exclaimed, at last, endeavouring to re-assure himself.

"Perhaps not—but one word, most likely, is enough. She is alarmed, and curious, and knows very well that something is wrong, though she cannot tell what; and that to expose *you* is for the interest of her son."

"To *expose* me!" cried Mr. Pouncet, with a gasp of rage and mortification.

"Yes," said Horace, coolly; "but," he added, producing that document out of his pocket, "I managed, fortunately, to bring away your letter."

Mr. Pouncet writhed silently under this

persecution, which he dared not resent; for it was quite true that the story of that past transaction, once laid open to the world, would empty those solemn boxes labelled with his clients' names, which made his private office look so important, and would banish him at once from Armitage Park, and many another great house. The unfortunate lawyer was at his wit's end. That secret would have died with Stenhouse but for the discovery of this cold-blooded and unmanageable young man; and Mr. Pouncet cursed the day when, in defiance of all accustomed rules, he admitted Horace to his office. What was a romance of possible expectations to him?

"Have you ever learnt anything more of your own circumstances and the fortune," said Mr. Pouncet, with a slight sneer, "which you expected when I saw you last?"

But when Horace answered—as he did at once, having previously resolved upon it—with a very succinct account, quite unencumbered by any reflections or exhibitions of feeling, of what he *had* discovered, the lawyer opened his eyes. The heir of such a heap of

money, penniless though he was at the present moment, was a very different individual from the poor Horace Scarsdale, with nothing but his cunning wits and unscrupulous mind to help him on in the world. The revelation reconciled Mr. Pouncet even to himself. It was no longer so sadly humiliating to acknowledge himself in the young man's power.

"And what will you do?" he asked, breathlessly, with already a difference in his tone. One does not speak to an attorney's clerk, even when he knows one's cherished secret, as one speaks to the heir of a good many thousands a-year.

"What can I do?" said Horace, rising in due proportion, and tasting the first sweetness of his wealth. "Forbidden to borrow—debarred from all ordinary means of reaping some present advantage; unless—I can be of use to you, if you make it worth my while—unless *you* can help me, Pouncet. You can if you please."

Mr. Pouncet winced a little at this familiar address. "Had you not better try," he suggested, "to make some arrangement with your father?"

"Arrangement with my father? What for? He has less power than you have: the will is expressly constructed so as to make arrangement impossible, and shut him out entirely," cried Horace, with a certain suppressed exultation of enmity. "Besides, he hates me, and I'd much rather arrange with you. Look here, Pouncet—I want to get married. Give me a thousand a-year, and I'll give you my best services, and my word of honour to pay you a reasonable sum, by way of acknowledgment, when I come into my property. Will you? There is no use lingering over it—say Yes or No."

"A thousand a-year!" cried Mr. Pouncet, in dismay.

"Less would be useless," said Horace, in his high-flying arrogance. "Besides, I could earn half as much anywhere, without asking any favour from you."

Poor Mr. Pouncet took his hand out of his pocket, and grinned at the young man with a helpless spite and disdain. Words were so incapable of expressing all the mingled mockery and mortification with which he heard

that last speech, that the unfortunate lawyer would have made derisive faces at him had he dared. As it was, he turned away to his desk, and growled under his breath, "Catch me giving you fifty if you hadn't known," by way of relieving his feelings. Stifled as it was, the expression did him good. He turned round again with only some spasmodic remains of that grin agitating the corners of his mouth.

"And you're going to marry? Any money —eh?" he said.

"I don't think it," said Horace—"but I should like to know your decision at once, for I have some arrangements to make."

"A thousand a-year for the whole term of your father's life? Why, I suppose he is no older than I am?—he may live for twenty years," said the unhappy lawyer, rubbing up the scanty hair upon his head.

"He may," said Horace, briefly; but, as he spoke, a terrible throb convulsed, in spite of himself, the young man's heart, upon which those deadly packets seemed to press like an intolerable weight.

"He may! And you ask me, a man in my senses, to undertake paying you an income of a thousand a-year for, perhaps, twenty years!"

"I ask you only to consider the matter, and what I might be able to do for you at the end of my probation," said Horace, loftily—"not to say my services for the present time. Don't do anything against your will. A lawsuit promoted by young Musgrave—by that time most likely my brother-in-law—would, I have no doubt, be quite as profitable to *me*."

The lawyer gave a gasp of rage and derision beyond words. "You could conduct it, you suppose?" he cried aloud—"*you!*"—which was very imprudent, but a burst of nature. Then he cooled himself down, with a little shiver of passion: he dared not irritate this remorseless, immovable boy.

"I could, easily, with all these facts in my possession," said Horace, with a careless gesture; and Mr. Pouncet saw his whole substance, his business, and, worst of all, his reputation, falling like so many card-houses at the touch of that unpitying hand.

But the interview did not end so. Mr. Pouncet consented at last, with many a grudge and inward compunction, to pay Horace the large stipend he claimed, on the tacit understanding that one-half of it was to be repaid to him when the young man came to his fortune; and the lawyer, though he had guessed rightly when he judged Mr. Scarsdale to be about his own age, notwithstanding, with the reckless boldness of humanity, began to reckon in his mind all the chances against the recluse's life. The wonder seemed to be that such a man, in such circumstances, could last so long: there could not be much vigour of existence left in him. A very short time now should surely make an end of these deplorable, hopeless years. So reckoned the lawyer, who cared nothing about Mr. Scarsdale; while that unhappy hermit's son, with all the desperation of an unnatural enmity, cherished a darker kind of speculation in his hard heart.

The conclusion of all was, however, that Mr. Pouncet wrote a placid business letter to Sir John Armitage, informing him that he

had just dispatched a confidential clerk, in whom he could place the most perfect reliance, to make the fullest investigation throughout the district. Mr. Pouncet very much regretted that Sir John could not furnish him with particulars, or indeed any clue whatever to the name and residence of the suspected old man; but had every confidence, *if there was any such person*, in the abilities of his clerk, who would leave no means untried for finding him out.

Sir John thought this epistle so completely satisfactory, that he forwarded it to Colonel Sutherland, with some uncomplimentary suggestions about a "cock-and-a-bull story," and feminine powers of imagination, which the Colonel did not read to Susan; and all the parties concerned were comfortably lulled out of their anxiety by the prospect of so complete an investigation. What might not be hoped from the researches of Mr. Pouncet's confidential clerk?

CHAPTER XIII.

WHILE the simple household at Milnehill felicitated itself on the reality of the search about to be made, Mr. Pouncet's confidential clerk left Kenlisle. Horace went slowly through the country, though he was not looking for any one. He did his journey on foot, and did it by very slow and gradual degrees—perhaps to favour slightly his worthy employer's fiction of a search, but in reality playing with, resisting by fits, yet always entertaining, the horrible attraction which drew him to Marchmain. He had nothing to do there which could give him a pretence of a lawful visit. The last time he had gone like a thief into his father's house, anxious to search into the secrets there; this time how

was he going?—in pretended friendship, or in open war? He could not tell. He only knew that a fascination too strong for him drew him on and on, though he fluttered in many a circle, prolonging his way, like a charmed bird, towards that house which contained the father of his life and the obstacle to his happiness. As he walked sullenly through these well-remembered paths, hovering round the borders of that moor which in May, sunshine, and daylight, a man with such black thoughts might well have feared to enter, he seemed to see perpetually before him, as in a picture, that pale spare figure in the dressing-gown—that formal attenuated man who sat by the polished dining-table, with his glass of purple claret, his two tall candles, and his reading-desk. Was that dismal existence life? Was there any pleasure in it to the forlorn endurer of all these nights and days? Would there be any cruelty in hastening his withdrawal from this bitter and impoverished existence? The questions formed dimly, and died away without articulate answer in the mind of his son. He

wanted to persuade himself, as he gradually neared the climax of his temptation and of his fate, that he came with no object, but simply because curiosity drew him to the old house; to see how things were going on there.

Horace came upon Marchmain from behind, on an afternoon of May. The moor was no wilderness at that season. The whins were burning under the sunshine, the heather blooming purple and fragrant, thrusting its flowery spires against the foot that disturbed their growth; and the young seedlings, sown here and there in little clumps, waved their delicate young leaves to the soft air, and glittered in the light with a genial spring triumph over the intractable soil. Even the dark moorburns and rivulets of water in the deep cuttings caught a grace from the sky, and brightened over their brown surface with a gleam of the blue heavens and white clouds above. Everything was sweet, and bright, and hopeful in that dull waste of unproductive soil, which at other times could look so dreary. The clump of firs on the hill-top looked down wistfully, no

longer weird spies, but gentle gazers upon the changed scene. But no change had passed upon Marchmain. The house, if any thing, was a little more lonely than of old, betraying unconsciously that some of the little life it had, had ebbed out of it. Susan's flowerpots stood naked in the window, with withered stalks of plants, long since dead, standing up dead and dismal from the dry mould in which they had once grown; left here by Peggy as a grim reminder to her master of the daughter—the only chance of love and kindness which he had remaining in the world—whom he had thrust remorselessly away; and with that calm sky declining towards evening, the sun slanting westward, the home-going hour lengthening its shadows over the long stretches of moorland, where by-and-bye a few labouring men should cross the sunlight to cottages clustered somewhere on the road, hid in the lower nooks of the hills, few objects more desolate and solitary than the house of Marchmain could have been imagined. Human step or human shadow was not near. The

undisturbed heather almost brushed against the step of the door. In most of the windows the blinds were down, as though the heart within was too sick to bear the light. This was how Horace found the house which had nursed his childhood and imprisoned his youth.

When the young man essayed to enter at the kitchen door, he found even that entrance, once hospitably ajar, now closed and bolted. He had scarcely courage to seek admittance boldly. He hovered about, making a faint noise among the rustling herbage and broken stones, enough in that solitude to bring Peggy peering to the kitchen window. Peggy had changed for the worse, like the house. She looked, at last, as if patience and strength were being exhausted out of her: her eyes were peevish and dilated, with dark rings round them; and she looked out with a keen, suspicious glance, as if even confidence in her own powers—that last stronghold—was failing her. When she saw Horace, a softening sentiment came over Peggy's face: she came softly to open the door to him, and brought

him into the kitchen, without a word either of welcome or comment. Then she wheeled her own cushioned chair out of the immediate range of the fire, and half led, half forced him into it. "You'll be tired," said Peggy, under her breath, with a tear twinkling bright in the corner of her eye. The surprise overcame her for the moment, and made her forget the sad difference between Susan's brother and Susan herself.

And Horace, too, for that instant was not like the Horace of old times. He was subdued by his own thoughts. An involuntary tremor seized him, to think of the dark purpose in his mind, and of why he had obtruded himself into this melancholy-familiar house. He could have supposed that his dreadful secret impulse—the horrible secret instruments he carried about with him — were betrayed and visible to any eye that looked keenly at him. But Peggy did not look keenly; she faltered with a real emotion at the sight of him, and he trembled before her salutation with an intense anguish and remorse, of which he could not have supposed

himself capable. Warnings sharp and terrible, of the remorse not to be removed, which should cling for ever to the traces of the deed done; but Horace shut his eyes to that consideration. In another moment he was fully himself—recovered from his rare and strange qualm of feebleness—pleased to find, in Peggy's softened mood, no suspicion of him or his intentions, and resolved to make the most of that unusual grace.

"I came to see how you were. How is *he*, Peggy?" said Horace, pointing to the door which opened into the hall.

"Speak low!—oh! speak low, for your life!" cried Peggy, in a whisper. "If he knowed I let you into this house he would murder me!"

"I should like to see him try," said Horace, grimly, with a smile over the fantastic idea; *that*, indeed, would be a better mode of removing this hindrance than any expedient he could devise. "He hates me so, does he?" he added, with a white smile of enmity. He was glad to hear of it—it spurred him to a passionate emulation in that unnatural art.

"'Tis himsel' he hates and mortifies—the Lord forgive him!" cried Peggy. "Eyeh, Master Horry, if you knowed the wreck and the ruin that the devil, and pride, and ill-will have made of that man!"

"I daresay he has not much pleasure in his life?" said Horace, half interrogatively.

"Pleasure! I'm the auldest friend he has in this world, though I'm but a servant," said Peggy, her eyes dilating still more with tears, which did not flow, but only reddened and expanded the limits which they filled; "but there's scarce an hour in the day, nor a day in the year, but I would see him die sooner than live as he's living now."

"You speak," said Horace, playing with his own self-terror, and turning a pale, ominous look upon her, before which she shrank instinctively, "as if you thought it would be a charity to rid him of his life."

"Eh, Mr. Horry?—the Lord forgive ye! Would you put such an accursed thought on me?" cried Peggy, with an ebullition of violence as tearful and faltering as her kindness. "God help us, master and servant,

two lone people, without comfort in this world! But it would be a new sight, and a strange sight, to see comfort come from *you.*"

"Why, Peggy, you said as much," said Horace, with momentary weakness.

"Then, I tell you, sir, murder's no charity," said Peggy, sharply. "I've little pleasure in my life by what I had in my young days, but I would have died more cheerful then nor now; and the master takes grit care, moor care nor I ever knew him take before, of his health and strength, as behoves a man at his time of life. He's aye at his medicine-chest off and on; and has the doors bolted and pistols in his room, for fear of robbers, though I'm aye saying there's no robbers like to come here. He's afflicted his flesh in the times that are past, but he's a careful liver now."

"That he may keep me a little longer out of my inheritance," said Horace, between his teeth.

Peggy stopped short in the middle of the kitchen, where she had been hastily laying out a rapidly prepared meal for her master's son.

"Keepin' ye out of what?" she said solemnly, and with a scared look in her eyes.

"Of my inheritance—it's no use humbugging me any longer," said Horace—"I know it all."

Peggy set down the dish she had in her hands, dropped upon the stool before the fire, and throwing her apron over her head, rocked herself for a few moments back and forward, in silence.

"Amen! it ought to have comed sooner; it must have comed some time," said Peggy at last to herself; "but the Lord forgive me, didn't I say and prophesy that when wance the bairns knowed it the end would come? Oh, Mr. Horry! for the love of God and your mother, if you have any love in you, go your ways, and tarry not a moment in this doomed house."

"You are not very charitable, Peggy," said Horace, who, by some diabolical impulse, began to recover his spirits at this stage of the interview; "especially as I presume your preparations were for me—and I'm rather hungry.

You can't surely refuse me a dinner, if it *is* in the kitchen, in my father's house?"

Peggy rose without a word, and placed bread and ale on the table beside the little dish of meat which she had abstracted from her master's dinner for his son's benefit.

"Eat, if ye can eat in this house and with sitch thoughts," said Peggy; "but I crave of ye to give God thanks ere ye break the bread."

As Peggy stood over him, severe and disapproving, the remembrance of many such scenes in his childhood came to the memory of Horace; scenes in which Susan appeared, sweetly saying her child's grace, and he himself rebelling and refusing, with Peggy standing by exactly as she did now—her judicial eye fixed sternly on him. He was a man now, and had bigger rebellions in hand. With a little sneer and levity in that momentary diabolical exhilaration of spirits, he said the child's grace which Peggy herself had taught him nearly twenty years ago. When he had repeated the amen, his father's faithful servant turned away from him to go about her need-

ful business, for it was drawing near to Mr. Scarsdale's dinner hour. But Horace put down his knife and fork upon his plate with a shudder of self-horror—the food choked him—he could not swallow the bread on which his lips, without any help from his heart, had dared at that terrible moment to ask God's blessing. The time of opportunity, which he tried to persuade himself he did not premeditate, but which was forcing itself upon him, approached moment by moment. He got up from the table with a nervous, imperceptible trembling, and went to stand by the fire where Peggy was busy, and then to wander through the apartment, always restlessly returning to that bright spot. An impulse of flight seized him at one moment—at another, a wild thought of thrusting himself into his father's very presence, by way of escaping the devil within him, and rather getting into hot words and a violent contest than this miserable guilt. But while he was at the height of his horrible excitement, Peggy, calmly doing her usual business, went out of the kitchen to spread the table in her master's lonely dining-

room. Horace, wild as in a fever, drew with trembling hands out of his pocket one of his mysterious packets. He burst the paper open clumsily, awkwardly, with fingers which seemed made of lead. A great shower of white powder fell upon the floor at his feet, but none reached the dish to which he supposed he had directed it. Trying to remedy this failure, he was startled by a sound, as of Peggy's return. With a great start, which spilt still more of that fatal dust, he thrust it back into his breast, and in a horror of discovery snatched at something near him, he could not see what it was, and swept into the fire that evidence of his purpose. Having done, or thinking that he had done this, he threw the cloth out of his hands into the fire, and rushed out of the room and the house. As he escaped he saw somehow, by virtue of his passion and fever of overpowering excitement, Peggy coming quietly with a napkin over her arm, and her great white apron shining through the obscurity of the narrow passage, into the kitchen. That home figure, in its everyday occupation, struck him bitterly in

his own tremor; he had failed, but he was guilty. No harm to his father had the parricide left behind him, but he was his father's murderer in his own heart; and all the world and all its riches could never make of him again the same Horace Scarsdale who scowled sullen but innocent upon that same Peggy, before the baleful knowledge for which he thirsted had scorched all nature out of his heart.

CHAPTER XIV.

HORACE never knew how he passed that night; during the twilight and the early darkness he hovered about the moor, lying down among the fragrant heather, when now and then for a moment he could keep still, and feeling the penetrating damp of the bog steal into his limbs, and the dark, noiseless prick of the whin bushes, startling him into energy as he rose out of that feverish, momentary rest. When the night had quite fallen—a dark summer night, soft, but gloomy, with a few faint stars, but no moon—he stole once more, circling and sweeping about the house, towards Marchmain; for no purpose, only to look in at the

uncurtained window, and see sitting there in his utter solitude the formal figure, erect and motionless, which had shadowed, like a baleful tree, all his own young life. There he sat, a little turned aside from his familiar position at the head of the table, as though even he was glad to seek a little companionship in the morsel of evening fire which Peggy lighted in silent compassion every night; with his little reading-desk upon the table, and his glass of claret reflected in that shining surface, and the two tall candles lighting his white, worn visage, and the open page. There he sat, reading like an automaton, turning the leaves at regular intervals, doing the business to which he enforced himself, with his pale fingers and his rigid face. To think that one wicked, lawful expression of a dead man's will could have drained the humanity thus out of one who was a woman's husband and the father of children, when that devilish stroke smote him in full career! The woman was dead ages since, and the children banished; and dead down in its miserable solitude had stiffened that vexed heart. Did

he ever have a heart, that dismal man, at his dreary occupation, forlorn by the evening fire?—or was this *life* which he lived, hugging to his bosom through all these years that big wrong which he had made the pivot of his impoverished existence? Who could tell? but there might, at least, have been pity in the kindred eyes which watched him through that melancholy night.

There was no pity, however, in the eyes of Horace: when his first guilty fear of being discovered was over, he stood and gazed, with a burning, steady gaze, upon his enemy. Years and days of his own existence rose before Horace as he looked; he heard himself once more addressed with that killing politeness which murdered nature in him; he saw himself once more lowering in a fierce, unnatural restraint at that same miserable table, cursing, and not blessing, the very bread he ate. He saw Susan's head drooping, in timid and terrified silence, opposite that lonely man. Had there been heart or hope in him, would he have banished the harmless girl, to whom Horace did contemptuous

justice for once in his life? And as the young man gazed the fire burned. For a moment he seemed to see, by a better revelation, all the injury—a thousand times worse than disinheritance—which his father had done him; and became aware furiously, without regretting it, by some extraordinary magic of hatred, of his own unlovely character, the malicious creation of his father's cruelty. These were dreadful thoughts; but he did not seek to get rid of them—rather encouraged the baleful imagination, and wrapped himself in its hostile suggestions. Nature! that was abrogated long ago by Mr. Scarsdale's own words. They were rivals to the death—nothing but the bitterest dislike and mutual enmity could exist between that father and son; and Horace felt himself acquitted from any tie of nature by the thought.

While he stood thus, watching, Mr. Scarsdale, innocent of any enemy at the window, put up his hand to his head for a few minutes, as if in suffering, and then, rising, left the room. When he entered again he carried in his hand a mahogany box, bound with brass,

not unlike a small desk. Horace, who watched all his proceedings keenly, with excited attention, saw him take out a vial, hold it up to the light, and then measure out for himself a minute dose of the medicine it contained. With eyes that burned through the darkness, Horace watched and noted. The box was left standing by his father's side on the table—where had he brought it from? The young man watched and waited, shivering for long hours, till Mr. Scarsdale's time for retiring came. Then he followed eagerly with his eyes the ghostly figure which glided out of the room, with the box under one arm. The light reappeared a few minutes after in the window of Mr. Scarsdale's bedroom, into the secrets of which he had no power of spying. Then he wandered away blindly over the invisible heather, feeling nothing of the pricks that caught him on every side, insensible to the fresh night breezes blowing about his cheeks, unthinking where he went. When the morning came he could have fancied that he had slept there, so profound was his miserable pre-

occupation. But he had not slept there. The other man within him had struck out resolutely across the night, and gained shelter in a roadside public-house, from whence it was, refreshed and resolute, that he now came.

That same afternoon Horace once more essayed an entrance at Marchmain. Peggy received him with a suspicious face, but thrust him into the kitchen with a haste and force which betrayed to Horace that, as once before, her master was out, and everything propitious for him. He asked the question hurriedly.

"What does the like of you want here, Mr. Horry, two days running?" said the startled woman; "and what's your business if he's out or in? I tauld ye last time, and ye know what came o't. It's no' your meaning that you came to see *him*, like a dutiful son?"

"No, Peggy; but only to look for something I want in my old room. I confess I got frightened yesterday," said Horace, with a grim, and somewhat tremulous smile. "I had no desire to meet him, fierce and furious as he used to be, or polite, which is worse. I

ran away: but to-day you will surely let me go upstairs?"

"And what for," said Peggy, steadily fixing her eyes on his face, "did you throw *yon* napkin in the fire?"

Horace grew pale in spite of himself. "A napkin? Did I throw it in the fire? I was not aware of it," he said, with all the boldness he could muster. "However, let me go upstairs."

Peggy looked at him, and shook her head. "Ye'll be a-going and rummaging again," she said, with a voice of grieved uncomprehension. She had brought him up, and her heart warmed to him, unlovable as he was.

"I tell you I have found out everything. What should I rummage for?—and a great deal of good it is to me, now I know all," said Horace, in a tone more natural than Peggy had yet heard from his lips. "Go you and watch, Peggy, and let me know when my father appears."

Peggy followed him mournfully, Still, shaking her head, she went in after him with suspicion, and looked round the bare walls of

his old room. "I'm bound to say I can see nowght to look for here," said Peggy, sharply; but, after another inspection, she went reluctantly up to her watch-tower—the store-room —to look for her master's approach. Whenever she was gone, Horace stole noiselessly as a ghost into his father's apartment. It was not a murderous light that shone from the May skies into that room, the most comfortable in the house—but the young felon had night and darkness in his face. The box stood on the dressing-table, beside that chair of Mr. Scarsdale's, in which some malicious ghost might have sat, it looked so occupied and observant. With a trembling yet rapid hand, Horace opened the box, and took out of it the little phial which he had seen his father use. It was carefully closed, with a piece of pink leather tied over the cork, and a very peculiar knot, which Horace, with his excited fingers, found great difficulty in opening. When he had succeeded, he poured out its contents, and replaced them from another of his own sealed packets. He did this mechanically and methodically, but with the

cold dew bursting on his face, and his fingers, in their haste and tremble, fumbling over the knot, which he did not seem able to tie as it was before. When he had replaced it, and closed the box, he stood, trembling and miserable, looking at it. He could not tell whether he had placed the phial exactly as it was before: the box now would not close perfectly, and he could not remember, with his scared and desperate wits, whether it had been so when he opened it. At last, impatient, he put down the lid violently, with a jar which startled him into a fever of apprehension. Somebody must have heard it! — it went through his own head and heart with a thrill of terror. Then he skulked out, with that stealthy horror in his face which should henceforward be the prevailing sentiment of Horace Scarsdale's unhappy countenance. Twice a parricide!—without calling Peggy from her watch, or daring to look in her face, he stole out the back-way from his father's house, leaving Death and Murder there!

A week after, Mr. Pouncet's confidential clerk returned to Kenlisle. He was restless,

and deadly pale, and went to his desk to look for letters with a horrible anxiety. There were no letters there; and he turned out again with a breathless flutter of excitement to see his principal, and speak as he best could about business. But neither Mr. Pouncet nor any other person had heard anything from Marchmain, and Horace went out again in a miserable fever, which all his efforts could not quite conceal. He had laid the train; but heaven knows how long it might smoulder before the spark was set to that thread of death!

CHAPTER XV.

WHILE these dark elements of tragedy were gathering about the lonely house of Marchmain, things went on very cheerfully in Milnehill, where everybody was vaguely encouraged by the idea of the investigation going on which might restore some wreck of fortune to the young Rifleman; and where a still more engrossing pursuit reconciled that hero himself to the necessity of waiting for news of this possible enrichment. Roger, who had no great hopes on the subject, bore the suspense with the greatest patience, and never, indeed, showed the least signs of anxiety, except when it seemed likely that a word or two of lamentation over his fate would call forth the compassion of the ladies—which compassion was

very sincere on Susan's part, and good-humouredly satirical on that of Mrs. Melrose. "It's easy to see the poor young man's losing heart altogether with this waiting," the old lady would say with much gravity; "for you see, Susan, my dear, it's not to be expected that he can find anything here to amuse him, poor man, seeing nothing but two old people and a quiet little girl like you." Mrs. Melrose had quite taken up her abode at Milnehill since Roger's arrival. She said it was good for her health to smell the chestnut blossoms, and overlook Uncle Edward's gardening—and a very cheerful and lively addition she made to the happy house.

One morning, however, the quiet progress of affairs was interrupted by a letter, which Roger read not without a little agitation at the breakfast-table. When he had come to the end he handed it over suddenly, with a slight impetuous impulse, to the Colonel, who took it with his usual kind look of serious attention, put on his spectacles immediately, and addressed himself to the perusal of the letter with much gravity and earnestness. It

was from Roger's mother, and written partly under the inspiration of little Edmund, messages from whom were mixed with everything the timid woman said—

"My dearest Boy—Your dear letter and the news of your arrival brought the greatest pleasure I have known for many a long day, though it came in the midst of great trouble, my dear Mr. Stenhouse having been buried just a few days before; a very great affliction, which I trust, for *all your sakes*, my dear boy, yours and little Edmund's, and your dear sisters', I shall have strength to bear. Little Edmund interrupts me to say—and I must give you the *very* words of his message, or he will not be pleased—that, please, you're to come home directly, and that his papa has left him a great deal of money, and he means to give you half of it, and wants so very, very much to see his brother Roger. My own boy, I must ask you to be very good to dear little Edmund; he has been such an invalid, the dear child, that everybody has always yielded to him all his life, and he does love *you* so! Since ever he could speak he

has kept on entreating me to tell him of his brother Roger, and he thinks there is not such another in the world; and he is very good, the dear little fellow, when he is not in pain, and one takes a little care and knows his way. However, I have something to tell you besides. The day before yesterday along with your letter there came a letter to my dear Mr. Stenhouse, which Edmund opened before I saw what he was doing. Edmund tells me to say that he does so hope you will come soon to see the cricketing in Leasough Park; and he thinks if you would join the Leasough eleven—Leasough is a village two miles off, where we always go for our drive, and where everybody knows Edmund—they would be sure to win. But about Mr. Pouncet's letter, my dear son. It seemed written in a great fright, saying that Sir John Armitage had written to him something about you, and what *should* he do?—and speaking in a very improper manner, actually *cursing* the day he did something, which it seems my dear Mr. Stenhouse must have known of, and asking that young Mr. Scarsdale, Colonel Suther-

land's nephew, who seemed to know about it too, might be sent to Kenlisle at once. Edmund said, 'Mamma, send for Mr. Scarsdale directly' (he is *so* clever, the dear child), and so I did. But I must first go back to tell you that my dear Mr. Stenhouse himself had sent for young Mr. Scarsdale, and spoke with him in private, and charged him, as I heard with my own ears—dear Julius being taken very bad, and not knowing what he said—that 'the boy was not to know'—just the day before his death. When Mr. Scarsdale came, I am sorry to say he was not so polite as I should have expected from Colonel Sutherland's nephew, and would not tell either Edmund or me anything, but rather sneered at my poor child, and went off all in haste, keeping the letter in his hand. I should have sent it to you if he had not taken it away. Now, I do not know what this may mean—nor can it be expected that Edmund should, as he is only a child; but both he and I, my dear boy, beg of you to ask the Colonel what he thinks, and to try to find out yourself. And whatever you do, dear, don't trust to *that* Mr. Pouncet; for it

was quite clear to me by his letter that he had somehow done you wrong, and wanted to conceal it. Edmund says, 'Tell Roger, mamma, he's not to trust Scarsdale either;' but indeed I scarcely have the heart to say so, remembering that he's the dear good Colonel's nephew —only he was not so kind as he might have been, you know, and I have some reason to think he is fond of Amelia—which should surely keep him from doing anything that would harm her brother.

"But, my dearest boy, come home. I have not seen you—my son—my baby—my first-born!—for *so* many years, and my heart yearns for a sight of you. Oh, come to me! Let me see you under my own roof! Roger —my son—my dear boy—come home to your mother! There is no other friend who can have so close a claim upon my darling child!

"Always your loving mother,

"A. STENHOUSE."

"You will go at once?" said the Colonel, with some gravity, as he gave the letter back into Roger's hand.

Go at once! The words rung upon Susan's

ear like a cannon-shot. She turned her blue eyes with a look of amazed alarm from her uncle to Roger; then she became suddenly very much busied with the duties of the breakfast table, swallowing down, as a very attentive observer might have noticed, something in her throat, and carefully keeping her eyes upon her tea-pot and coffee-pot. Roger had made no answer as yet. While the Colonel inclined his ear attentively across the table for the young man's reply, Roger was studying Susan's face; and it is not hard to explain that common paradox of youthful nature, which made Susan's silent signs of sudden disappointment and vexation the most exhilarating sight in the world to the young Rifleman. While Uncle Edward listened, and heard nothing, and fancied his own deaf ear in fault, Roger, quite otherwise occupied—thinking, it is to be feared, not much about his mother, and nothing at all about Mr. Pouncet—concentrated all his faculties on the honest face of Susan, with its womanly but unconcealable dismay.

"Eh, Musgrave?" said the Colonel, stoop-

ing towards his young guest, and putting up his kind hand over his deaf ear.

"I suppose so, sir," said Roger, in high spirits. Then, after a little pause, with sham sentiment, got up simply as a trap for Susan —"If one could only find out the secret of ubiquity, so that one might be able to content one's mother, and enjoy one's self, at the same time."

Yielding to this temptation, Susan glanced up at the young hero for a moment, with some tender tearfulness about her eyes; but, finding nothing but triumph and delight in his, returned, disgusted, and much more inclined to cry than before, to the contemplation of her coffee-pot.

"One may manage that, I hope, without any ubiquity," said the Colonel, still very gravely; for the old soldier was moved too seriously by this letter to notice the by-play of the youthful drama going on under his eyes. "But I am surprised you are not more excited by your mother's communication, Roger. My dear fellow, it is quite evident *now* that there must be something in it; and

a pretty person to conduct an investigation this Pouncet must be, after what you have just heard. Why, to be sure, referring the search to a guilty party is the very way to keep ourselves in darkness. I'll tell you what, Musgrave; if you do not see after it at once, I shall take the liberty of constituting myself your guardian, and set out to-day."

Roger stretched out his hand to meet that of Colonel Sutherland, who had gradually warmed as he spoke. "Amen," said the young man. "Till I can persuade some still kinder and fairer hand to assume the reins, I could not have any guardian I should like so well."

"Pshaw!" said Uncle Edward, awakening to the fact that his young guest was speaking *at* Susan much more than to himself—"never mind fairer hands. What do you mean to do?"

Upon which, Roger perceiving that his last shot had taken due effect, grew serious all at once.

"It does look at last as if there was something in it," he said. "I have thought all

along that if any mischief had been done Pouncet must have known of it; and he was a man of such character! I cannot think yet how it is possible that he could put himself or his reputation in danger to defraud me; —but certainly," continued Roger, growing rather red and wrathful, "the pretence of a sham investigation and a confidential clerk—"

"Ah!" cried Uncle Edward, with a sharp short exclamation like a sudden pang—"most likely it was—well, well, well!—*we* cannot help it; it is to his own Master that each of us standeth or falleth: let us not blame till we know."

"Uncle," said Susan in alarm, coming round to his side and sliding her hand into his, "it is something about Horace?—something more?"

"No, my love, nothing more—nothing at all that one could build upon," said the Colonel tenderly; "only I rather fear, Susan, as we both did when you came first to Milnehill, that Horace knows of some injury which has been done to Roger, and yet does not let him know."

Susan made a momentary pause of shame and distress as her uncle spoke, and then raised her eyes, full of tears and entreaty, to Roger's face. Poor Susan believed that these tears were all about her brother, and would not have acknowledged that a single drop of that gentle rain had relation to the "going away" with which this conversation arose.

Roger, however, could not bear these tears. He put his mother's letter hastily into her hand—would she read it? There was really nothing blaming Mr. Scarsdale, as she would see. And Susan stood shy and tearful, with the paper trembling in her hand—a maidenly, womanly, natural restraint forbidding her to read, while her heart yearned, notwithstanding, towards Roger's mother; while Roger kept looking at her with anxious eyes, as earnest to have her read it as though his fate depended on the issue. Did either of them think of Horace in connection with this letter? or what, between these two young dreamers, trembling on the edge of their romance, was Colonel Sutherland, with very serious thoughts in his mind and matters in his hand, to do?

He got up after a few minutes waiting, with good-humoured impatience.

"Boys and girls," said Uncle Edward, "with all their life before them, like you young people, may waste a few hours of it without much harm done; but what I have to do must be done quickly. Make up your mind, Roger, my good friend; but as for me, I am going off to Armitage by the first train. Susan, my love, Mrs. Melrose will stay with you; for this young fellow's interests, you see, must be looked after, whether he wishes it or not—especially, my dear"—and Uncle Edward's kind face grew darker as he made that significant pause.

"Especially if Horace has had any share in it," cried Susan. "Oh, Mr. Musgrave!" and a few tears fell suddenly over Roger's mother's letter. The Colonel at the moment had stepped out of the room to give his instructions to Patchey, and Susan's one sole remaining intention, on which all her mind was fixed, was to rush after him; but that involuntary turn of her head and exclamation of her lips sealed Susan's fate. Roger was not

the man to let slip so advantageous a moment—and had things to do of more importance than packing his portmanteau before he left Milnehill.

CHAPTER XVI.

COLONEL SUTHERLAND and his young friend, who had by this time something to communicate which the discreet old soldier was perhaps not unprepared to hear, left Edinburgh that evening by the earliest train they could get which stopped anywhere near Armitage Park. The Colonel was most seriously in earnest, entirely occupied with the new position of affairs; while Roger, quickened by the change in his own personal circumstances, speculated a little on this new possibility of improving his fortune, and was exceedingly well content to dream of endowing Susan with something more than the old Grange, the empty and miserable condition of which came dolefully on his memory, now that he and his home were likely to have

a lawful mistress. As they travelled, the Colonel exhausted himself in inquiries and suggestions as to what this hidden business could be, touching on every mode known to his innocence, by which an attorney could defraud a client, but of course never approaching within a thousand miles of the one method in which *this* attorney had succeeded in defrauding his; while Roger listened in a happy mist, half hearing—dwelling in his own mind on the plea he had already won, in the most arbitrary court in existence, and feeling the other plea important in consequence; but light, light and trivial, after all, a feather to his happiness. Thus they went on, very good companions, to Armitage, where Sir John received them with open arms; and in spite of all Colonel Sutherland's resistance, kept them four-and-twenty hours without doing anything. This delay postponed the execution of their business for a longer space than twenty-four hours, and produced other results not less important; for it left Horace time, in his restless wretchedness, to set out once more to Harliflax.

If Horace Scarsdale had encountered his uncle there, the chances are that he would have found very little difficulty in betraying his "friend" and principal. The young man had miscalculated the magnitude of those affairs in which he had embroiled himself. *He* knew well enough that there was nothing soft or sentimental, and not very much of human impressionable stuff in his own nature, but he did not know that a mind inaccessible to compassion or sympathy may still be desperately alive to all the selfish horrors of remorse and guilt, and that not even the promised income of a thousand a-year which he had forced from Mr. Pouncet's fears and hopes, or the expectation which he entertained of being able to persuade Amelia Stenhouse into an immediate marriage, could make him insensible to that dread horror of suspense in which he lived. There were no letters, no newspaper paragraphs, or country intimation of a sudden death—darkness and silence immovable had dropped like a veil over all that district which enclosed Marchmain. Every day and every night Horace could see

that wild stretch of moorland brooding under its dismal sky; and there was scarcely a moment, sleeping or waking, in which his guilty imagination ceased to dwell in his father's lonely house. Had he met Colonel Sutherland in this miserable crisis of his affairs, the chances are that Horace would gladly have given a sop to his fevered conscience by telling all he knew of Mr. Pouncet's fraud. As it was, possessed with a restlessness which he could not subdue, he returned to Harliflax, the only *other* place in the world where he could find even a temporary interest—resisting, with all the strength he still could muster, the dread curiosity which drew him to Marchmain.

Mr. Pouncet accordingly was alone when Sir John Armitage, the Colonel, and Roger made an unexpected descent upon him. There was nothing to frighten a good dissembler in the entire three of them, honest sincere souls each in their way, who came here with suspicion, it is true, yet had a natural habit of believing what was said to them. Mr. Pouncet played his part very

well. Knowing that his letter itself was out of their power, and could not be brought against him, he made his defence lightly. A lady's mistake, a thing most easily explained: —he had indeed written to his friend Stenhouse about some private matters of business, and his wife had made a woman's blunder about it, knowing nothing of business, and supposing, of course, that there could be no Musgrave in the world but her son. Of course Sir John might be perfectly assured that he should take every possible step to ascertain anything affecting Mr. Musgrave's interests—indeed, was not the late Mr. Musgrave his client? And now especially, when his own honour was involved, his exertions should be redoubled; he had already sent his confidential clerk—

Here Colonel Sutherland interrupted the fluent speaker: "Did the confidential clerk, whom you sent to make inquiries, happen to be my nephew, Horace Scarsdale?" asked the old soldier.

"Your *nephew!*" Mr. Pouncet stood dismayed. "The young man's name was cer-

tainly Scarsdale," he said, after a little puzzled pause.

"Then I have no doubt that accounts for the failure of the investigation," said the Colonel, who had been bending his deaf ear to the wily attorney with an earnest attention, strangely out of keeping with the insincere and untrustworthy voice to which he listened. "Much grief as it gives me to say so, Armitage, I am afraid Horace would hinder rather than help. I don't know how he has mixed himself up with such an affair," said Uncle Edward, musing; "but he certainly has to do with it somehow. He's—alas! very clever, this nephew of mine; unhappily brought up, poor fellow! fond of intrigue, I fear, one kind or another. Mr. Pouncet, I'd recommend you to employ another man."

"With the greatest of pleasure," said Mr. Pouncet, chuckling to himself; "of course, I yield any little knowledge I may have of young Scarsdale to the superior information of a relative—ha, ha! Your candid judgment does you credit, I am sure, Colonel. Mr. Scarsdale is not here to-day, I am sorry to

say; very unsettled lately he has appeared to me. Ah, come in, Edwards! I've some instructions to give you before these gentlemen. We will lose no time, Sir John, and you shall hear my directions with your own ears."

"That'll do, Pouncet" said Sir John, with a slight air of disgust. "My own opinion is, you're a deal too easy in your talk to mean anything. Hope you don't know any more about it than you choose to tell us, which appears to me, begging your pardon, a long way more likely than not; for who's to cheat a man if it isn't his own attorney? Send your clerk if you like, I'll have nothing to do with it. If one wants a thing well done, one must do it onesself. Come along, Sutherland; no, I'm not satisfied, and I don't pretend to be."

Saying which, in spite of Mr. Pouncet's strenuous endeavours to explain, and to set himself right with his wealthy client, Sir John fought his way out, dragging along with him his young and his old friend. The Colonel looked very grave and rather sad, wondering what "motive" Horace could have for helping to injure Roger. Meanwhile, that young hero

himself took, it is to be confessed, more amusement than anything else from the entire matter. His hopes were so slight that they did not at all excite him, whereas he could not but perceive that Sir John's little burst of ill-humour, and Mr. Pouncet's discomfiture thereat, was tolerably good fun. They went to the inn to have lunch, all three displaying their various humours — of which Sir John's was the most demonstrative and plain-spoken.

"I'll tell you what," said the baronet; "Pouncet's a deal too well up in his defence. I never like a man who knows just exactly what to say for himself when he's accused of a sudden—ten chances to one, look you, Roger, that he's guilty; for if he's guilty, of course he knew every word you were going to say—whereas if he's innocent, he's taken by surprise and shows it. That's my opinion; and, by Jove, if the rascal took in Musgrave, I'll bet you something he's taken in me as well. But you may rely upon it I'll have the whole affair looked into now."

"Eh?" said Colonel Sutherland, stooping over the chair into which Sir John had thrown

himself, with his hand curved over his ear; "have the whole affair looked into now? Well, Armitage, if I have less concern in it one way than you, I have more another. There's still a week before my Ned comes home, I'll see what I can do with my own eyes and spectacles. I'm an old campaigner: twenty miles a day over a pleasant country is no extraordinary work for an old soldier like me."

"And I, Colonel—what am I to say to you for such painstaking kindness?" said Roger, forgetting his amusement in hearty gratitude and admiration.

"My dear boy, it's a great deal for your sake, but something for the sake of my sister's son," said the Colonel, with a smile and a sigh—"and only till my boy's holidays begin; but as for you, go on to whatever is the name of the place and see your mother, and the pretty sisters and the little boy, and if there's anything to be heard of Horace there, send me word; and don't forget if you do meet with him that he is, in spite of everything—"

"Susan's brother!—there is not a chance that I shall forget," said Roger, brightly.

Meanwhile Sir John, catching the sound of one word, which tickled the ear of his possessing demon, muttered to himself, "Pretty sisters!" Then added aloud, "Going to see your mother, Roger? Possibly she's got something further to tell us—I'll go too."

CHAPTER XVII.

When Horace returned to Harliflax it was night—too late even for an accepted lover to gain admittance to the widowed house of Mrs. Stenhouse, and Horace was not even an openly accepted lover. These ten days had changed him greatly. This monstrous crime had indeed germinated in his mind from the very hour of his return from London; but that passion of temptation was very different from the horror of unbearable suspense and anxiety which consumed him now. While he was still only about to do it, his mind was buoyed up by a hideous fascination, which carried him over time and space as though upon a devil's wings. Now that he had done it, every hour was a staring, wide-eyed

Medusa, watching and petrifying; and still, through the cold, creeping silence, there came no sound; no cry of the death-agony which he had contrived, nor shout of the avenger of blood behind; no sobbing forth of the dear life shed by his hands, and no cry of Murder! Murder!—only a convulsive whisper of the word among the grass and leaves, and secret spies of nature, which pricked him into madness, and turned the blood in his veins to fire. He was changed, imperceptibly to himself, but in the strangest way. Every day of this week in which he had been compassing his father's death had made him more like his father. His face had lost its colour and roundness—the soft outline of youth was gone; and in its place had come a sharpened distinction of feature, unusual at his years. His hair, which, to his great wonder, came out in handfuls when he dressed it, fell lank, like that of the recluse at Marchmain; and even his dress took the same resemblance, and flew back from his figure, as he went, with his restless haste of motion, from street to street. But the sneer and the disdain had

almost gone out of Horace's face: he could no longer afford these light emotions. His whole soul was burnt up with passions more intense—self-horror—anxiety, more acute and devouring than ever was the anxiety of love, to know his father's fate; and, above all, that overpowering certainty of personal guilt, which all the world and all its powers could never again loosen from his self-convicted heart.

It was night, and nobody saw him. Few knew him, besides, in these streets of Harliflax. He rushed to his lodgings, and found there were no letters there; then out again, and did not draw breath till he stood in the dark, on the opposite side of the way, looking into the bright moonlight at the house where Amelia Stenhouse slept the untroubled sleep of youth. There he stood in the depth of the night-shadow, looking how the night-radiance and illumination of that weird moon brought out the long, lofty line of terrace, the line of great houses of which Harliflax was proud. The night was so bright, and the air so still, that one slow figure,

gliding along there in front of the high, silent houses, was caught and wrapped in a silvery mantle, and drawn along noiselessly, like a pigmy, in the great flood of silent light. So white on that side of the road—so black here where he stood, among the shadows where the devils and lovers of darkness congregate. But, Amelia, which was she? He raised his eyes to the window which he knew was Amelia's, and tried to think of all the glories before him; fortune past counting, youth, love — nothing left out that was worth having, but—But!—that one miserable step out into the light across the blackness of darkness—the step which, God help his miserable brain, he was not about to take, but *had taken*, be the consequences what they might. When he thought of it there, opposite Amelia's window, standing in the darkness, his head swam and his tongue clove to his mouth. He had done it; he was not projecting, nor discussing, nor entertaining his subtle mind with the temptation; the temptation, with all its thrills of intoxicating excitement, its fascinations of fierce

and hostile fancy—its wild impulses of passion—was over for ever, and for ever, and for ever!—and the victim, disenchanted, stood cold, looking always into the blanched face of the deed which he had done. And Horace could no longer think of Amelia; not of the delight of marrying, and carrying away, and making his own property of the beauty; not of the boundless wealth he should have to bestow on her one day; not of the thousand a-year which he believed would induce her to marry him immediately, and which for that sole reason; and no other, he had wrung out of Mr. Pouncet. He had pled his cause warmly with herself, and his love had blazed about her not so many days ago when he was at Harliflax; but he could not turn his thoughts to her now; he could not warm his torpid mind with remembering her beauty; he could not rouse his fierce animal passion. Something black and cold stood first in his mind between him and his fortune—between him and what he called happiness. Murder had overshadowed love, and killed it. He

had no longer any thoughts to spare save for that horrible hag whom he had taken into his heart!

As he stood, however, thinking his own thoughts, it soon became vaguely visible to Horace that all was not entirely at rest in the house he was gazing at. Scarcely visible in the great flood of moonlight, there still was now and then the gleam of a light showing for a moment from one floor to another, as somebody went or came downstairs; and sounds began to be audible in the extreme stillness even where he stood. Shortly afterwards Stevens came to the door rubbing his eyes, and went down the street, with a sort of reluctant rapidity, to the doctor's house at the corner. Horace comprehended it as well as though he had been within and knew all. Edmund was ill. Death was not to be defrauded of that little victim: Edmund was going to die. When the servant came back with the doctor, Horace crossed the road and entered with them, nobody observing him in the excitement — entered he scarcely knew why, with a morbid craving after death and

suffering. He was anxious to see how that child would meet the last adversary; curious to observe how the family would arrange itself around the deathbed of the little heir; the poor little heir! who had enjoyed for so short a time his childish importance, his eager liberality of intention. But Horace had no pity to spare for Edmund, or for any other person in the world.

Edmund Stenhouse was dying (as they thought) in the warm parlour where he had lived. He had been worse than usual for a day or two, and was laid there upon a sofa, so that he might not have the fatigue of removal; but though propped up with pillows, for the sake of his painful and hard breathing, he looked very little different from his usual condition. He was shouting out eagerly for pen and paper when Horace passed in at the door. He did not want the doctor; he would not be blistered any more, whatever the doctor said. He wanted somebody out of papa's office; he was going to make his will, and die.

"I tell you, mamma, I'm not going to take any more physic!" cried the poor child, thrust-

ing aside with his hasty, feeble hand the glassful of some stimulating mixture which the anxious woman held to him. "I'm going to die! I tell you I've made up my mind!—what's the use of sending for doctors and stuff? Send for Scarsdale, or somebody. I'm going to make my will—I'm going to die!"

"I don't believe he is, though," said Horace, involuntarily coming forward, without very well knowing what he did. He was desperately interested, somehow, in this dread death which he had invoked. He was curious to see its workings, and how it approached; but he could not recognize that awful presence here.

Mrs. Stenhouse turned round with a little cry of recognition. There was a gleam of gratitude in her eyes: she could almost have taken into her arms the stranger who did not believe that Edmund was dying, and forgave Horace his former offences on the moment. "Oh, Mr. Scarsdale!—then you *don't* see a great difference in him?" cried the poor woman, with a flutter at her heart. She could

take courage even from that feeble flicker of hope.

"Oh, here's Scarsdale," said Edmund, with a gasp of hard-drawn breath. "I want you to write out my will directly—directly, do you hear? because I'm going to die; you're to put it all down about me, Edmund Stenhouse, like papa's—I'd do it myself, only I can't write as well as a grown-up man; and I want to leave everything—except plenty of money for my mother and a little for the girls—to my brother Roger. Make haste, do you hear? because I'll die first if you don't be quick, and then what's the good of your coming here?"

"Humour him," said the doctor under his breath.

"Oh, doctor, is he so very, very bad?" cried poor foolish Mrs. Stenhouse, losing the morsel of heart she had picked up from Horace's words.

"He is very much excited—humour him," said the doctor authoritatively; "just now do exactly what he says. Thank heaven, there can't be much harm done in this way even by

a spoiled child. The law don't recognize testators of ten years old."

"Doctor, go home to bed, and don't come if mamma should send for you again," said little Edmund; "I can die all the same without you looking at me; but first I'll make my will; I shall—and then I'll die; doctor, go home to bed."

"Thank you, I will," said the doctor, yawning; "but don't you be so very sure about dying, my young hero. I'll see him to-morrow, Mrs. Stenhouse. Mind what I say, *humour* him—he's very much excited, but he's no worse. Get him to sleep as soon as you can. Good night."

The doctor went away, and the unnecessary commotion subsided a little. The lingering housemaid went to bed, feeling somewhat defrauded of her tears, and tragically disappointed that the end was not coming to-night to poor little Edmund's tragi-comedy of life. So did Stevens, moralizing and very much disgusted at the interruption of his rest—"three nights all a-running!" said that injured man to himself, "and master, from

he was took bad till he died, was only twenty-four hours;" while in the meanwhile a strange scene was taking place in the invalid's parlour. There, in the close stifling atmosphere and under the subdued sick-room light, sat Horace writing—Horace with murder in his heart and a personal burden too overpowering to allow him to remember the share he had taken in his employer's fraud, setting down mechanically, scarcely alive enough for a gleam of derision, the impotent will from the lips of that innocent, imperative, despotic child. Amelia herself had glanced into the room and withdrawn again contemptuously, without her lover perceiving her; but the youngest and gentlest of the three sisters was with Mrs. Stenhouse, to help her in her watching, and had already begun to slumber peacefully in a chair. The mother herself sat at the foot of the sofa watching her boy, with eyes enlarged and dilated by many a vigil, and by that constant fear and scrutiny of his face; while, propped up among his pillows, Edmund half sat, half lay, dictating, with many a digression, his arbitrary, generous

intentions. The will was still incomplete, when sleep stole over the would-be testator. He drooped back among the cushions, and could no longer keep his fiery little eyes open. Was he dying with that last flutter of words, "my brother Roger," about his lips? No, only falling safe into the restless sleep of a sick child. When his sharp little voice had died away, and all was silent in the room, the two by his bedside looked strangely into each other's faces. What brought you here with your black thoughts, oh! dangerous, guilty man? He rose up alone in the still house inhabited of women, feeling for an instant a vague sensation of that power and freedom which the strong, unfettered by either law or virtue, may feel among the weak. What was to hinder him from ending by a touch that frail child's life?—he could have done it. What was to hinder him from going up in the darkness, and lifting out of her safe rest that beautiful Amelia? He stood looking for a moment at the timid woman before him, with a hundred suggestions and possibilities of additional guilt pricking him into life. What

was it to him now what he did, he who had made the plunge and done the deepest crime of nature? But he only looked at her a moment, with a savage consciousness of his power to outrage and devastate; and then laughed a short wild laugh, and went out as suddenly as he had come. Poor Mrs. Stenhouse stole out to fasten the door after him, with a momentary sensation of relief, as though she had escaped from a wild beast; and, coming back again, relapsed into an anxious study once more of Edmund's little pale sharp face. Edmund's will, magnificent and powerless, his last toy and plaything, lay on the table beside him. Was Edmund to live or to die?

CHAPTER XVIII.

A FEW days after this scene Roger Musgrave and Sir John Armitage arrived at Harliflax. Edmund was still living, and not less life-like than he had been for years, though his will was by this time signed and sealed. This will had been a ready means of renewing the flirtation, which was all the beautiful Amelia owned to maintaining with her father's clerk. Amelia was sadly tired of her mourning, and its inevitable decorums; she was glad to throw herself in Horace's way when he came to finish that child's will, which he did next morning, for Amelia's sake. Amelia wanted to ask him about this will; papa had been very unjust to the rest for Edmund's sake,

and now somebody told her that the little wretch (though she was sure she had cried her eyes out about him, and hoped with all her heart he would get better) was making a will, leaving everything to mamma's son by her first marriage, whom none of them had ever seen. Was it true? — *could* a little spoiled monkey like that, only eleven years old, make a will?—had anybody any right to give papa's property away from his children? Mr. Scarsdale knew it was not of herself she was thinking, but poor Eliza and Fanny—what was to become of them if *some one* did not think of their interests?—for mamma cared for nothing in the world but little Edmund and her other son. All this flood of question and statement poured upon Horace, who incautiously set the beautiful doubter's mind at rest by telling her that Edmund's will was as useless as any other toy of Edmund's, if the child died. Horace proceeded immediately to enlarge upon his own prospects, and the income he had already secured, but Amelia's heart was shut against him. She was not more cruel or cold-blooded

than a great many other people; she did not wish Edmund's death; but that being a thing which everybody calculated upon as "rather to be desired than otherwise for his own sake, poor child," Amelia's spirits rose a little with the idea of finding herself an heiress, and once more regaining command of the house. That sickly child made a vast difference in various matters to Amelia; without Edmund she could easily subdue her mother; with Edmund, she was only Mr. Stenhouse's eldest daughter, with two or three thousand pounds; but without him she was the mistress of a very pretty fortune. Perhaps it was not much wonder if the thoughts of the ambitious and uneducated young beauty availed themselves of this prospect without too much delicacy, and thrust Edmund out of the way. However, Horace found it very difficult to arrest her attention to the expression of his own wishes and arrangements. She was supremely indignant at the thought of anyone speaking to her of marriage at such a time. "Look at my mourning, Mr. Scarsdale, and think of Edmund, poor, dear

fellow!" cried the virtuous Amelia. If Amelia came in for her proper share of papa's money, she saw no reason why she should make anything less than a very brilliant match. So after she had beguiled her tedium by means of Horace, as long as, in the circumstances of the house, that was permissible, she went away stately and affronted, though by no means casting him off even now. He was not afraid; he could not have been in less real alarm if she had been his wife, but he wanted sorely to get back to the old frenzy of his first love-passion; he wanted to linger about her and on her, and make sure that she belonged to him. For her and for fortune he had played these terrible stakes, which only he and God knew of; and it was tantalizing to have the prize of his wickedness drawn away from him, when, perhaps, if he but knew, the obstacle was removed already, and fortune incomprehensible and stupendous, big enough to have purchased twice an Amelia, was already in his hand.

But when Horace came next to the house he found a still greater barrier arisen between

himself and Amelia. She no longer wanted to be amused—she was independent of him: he might come or he might go, and Amelia did not care. A new life had visited Mrs. Stenhouse's roof and family. Roger, the unknown brother, was there like a son at home, charming the little invalid, who had left all his wealth to him, out of the feverish excitement and unwholesome primary place, which were killing Edmund; warming his mother's heart into a late summer of peace and thankfulness; making himself acceptable even to the pretty sisters who admired him, and whom he admired. But it was not Roger who had displaced Horace with Amelia. A young man who was her brother, and, consequently, not to be fascinated, was of no account in the eyes of the beauty; but Sir John Armitage, if he was not very young, had many other qualities which made up for that want, and Sir John had already concluded to himself that he had seen no such fine woman since the days when he was young himself, and beauty was more abundant. Amelia did not lose an hour with the excellent baronet; she had not

only baited the hook, but landed her fish long before anybody else suspected her; and as for Horace, though that pretty by-play roused another demon within him, he had still no suspicions of Amelia—or rather, so absolute was his own self-regard, that he did not believe it possible that *he* could be set aside for any man or woman in the world.

"Nephew of Colonel Sutherland—hum—Scarsdale—happy to make your acquaintance," said Sir John, doubtfully. "We didn't expect to meet you here of all places in the world; did we, Roger, boy? Got something to say to you by-and-bye, Mr. Scarsdale—if you'll do us the honour—about that confounded fellow Pouncet, and this—this young fellow here."

"When you please, Sir John," said Horace, with a giddiness about him scarcely bearable. Sir John was playing with a newspaper on the table—the Kenlisle paper, which always came there. Perhaps the notice, the intimation, the seal of all his breathless terrors and ghastly expectations lay there; but it was as unattainable as though strong walls had sur-

rounded it, guarded by the trifling fingers of that stranger's hand. This newspaper, however—the common vulgar broadsheet—kept thus in his sight, yet beyond his reach, rapt the mind of Horace out of all excitement as to any other question. He knew well enough, with the dull certainty which other matters had in his mind, that Musgrave and his friend must have heard from Mrs. Stenhouse of his own connection with Mr. Pouncet, and call to the deathbed of her husband; but he felt no apprehension about their questions, cared nothing about the matter—in short, cared for nothing in the world at this moment but that paper rustling under the baronet's careless hand.

"Mr. Scarsdale is Edmund's man of business," cried Amelia. "Oh, poor dear little Edmund! I never shall forget that scene! Fancy, Sir John, Edmund taking it into his head that he was going to die, frightening poor mamma out of her wits, and sending for the doctor and Mr. Scarsdale long past midnight, when everybody was asleep. I peeped in at the door just after the doctor went, and there was poor Mr. Scarsdale at the table writing

Edmund's will. I had such a laugh after I knew all was safe, and my little brother no worse than usual; for, only think of Mr. Scarsdale humouring Edmund, when he knew it was no good, and writing his will!"

"It was very kind of Mr. Scarsdale, Amelia," said Mrs. Stenhouse.

"Oh, it might be, mamma; but wasn't it an odd scene?" cried the beauty, appealing to Sir John, and laughing at her own penetration. That was Amelia's kind of wit—a wit which, being always played against one suitor for the amusement of another, was wonderfully successful. The baronet was extremely tickled with "the scene;" the fair artist went over it again for his behalf, with a ludicrous sketch of Horace, "though he knew it was no good" making little Edmund's will. While this went on, Horace gradually wakened up into a grim surprise at this ridicule, and began to perceive that the object of his love really meant to hold him up to derision, and had changed her tone. The discovery roused him into something of his former self. What had he not done to gain possession of this girl? But to

her he was only a common one of her many admirers, to be laughed at and cast aside in his turn. Dead to all better emotions, Horace had yet a little of common life left in him through his intense arrogance and self-regard, and this pin-prick found it out.

"When Edmund called upon me to help him, it was not the first time I had been honoured by the confidence of the head of the house," said Horace, with a sinister impulse of revenge—"the other scene might not have struck Miss Stenhouse as amusing, but, as it happened, it was more interesting to me."

As he spoke, everybody looked at Horace. And perhaps then everybody noticed, for the first time, the change which had fallen upon the young man—putting their various interpretations upon it, as was natural. Amelia saw nothing but a desperate struggle of passion, love, and jealousy, most flatteringly tragic, in the white fever which consumed him. Sir John regarded him with his head a little on one side, and made a moral remark upon the effects of dissipation, in his own

mind; while Mrs. Stenhouse, leaping at the first troublesome idea which occurred to her, thought instantly, as he had meant them all to think, upon her husband's death-bed disclosure, and how it might affect her son.

"Oh, Mr. Scarsdale!" she cried, pleadingly, "you will tell Roger—you will tell Sir John, his kind friend, what it was that my dear Mr. Stenhouse had to say? It could be nothing against my son," she continued, nervously taking Roger's hand. Sir John roused himself up a little. It was much more agreeable flirting with Amelia; but, of course, as he had come to Harliflax about this matter, it was important to hear what the young man might have to say.

"If your late husband put his reputation into my hands, do you suppose I am going to betray him?" said Horace to Mrs. Stenhouse; but it was quite loud enough for everybody to hear.

"Mrs. Stenhouse will forgive you that—for her son's sake; we are all frail, and nobody can blame the defunct," said the baronet, with a hasty bow to the widow.

"Come, my boy, out with it; or at least let's have a little private conversation, Scarsdale—there's a good fellow; a secret is the greatest humbug in the world—never does anybody any good to keep it. Should have been able to bring the late Mr. Stenhouse to reason, I have no doubt, if I could have seen him. My good fellow, with Mrs. Stenhouse's permission, step downstairs with me."

"Oh, do please, if it's a secret, tell it here. I love a secret of all things," cried Amelia.

But Amelia was cowed a little. She had caught Horace's wild eye, where so many fires lay latent and smouldering: How could she tell what the secret might be? She was vaguely afraid in the midst of her curiosity. If he had gone downstairs with Sir John, Amelia would have followed them, and listened at the door.

"May I have the paper to look at?" said Horace, seizing it suddenly, as Sir John rose. "No, I do not trade in my friend's secrets. Mrs. Stenhouse, good morning. I shall send back the paper, and I will see you again before I go."

So saying, Horace left the room almost before any one was aware—before any one, save Amelia, saw what he was going to do. She, foreseeing his intention, vanished while he was still speaking, and waylaid him on the staircase.

"Oh, Mr. Scarsdale, was it something very dreadful?" said the breathless Amelia, with a pretty affectation of alarm.

"Do you care about your father's reputation?" said Horace, with one of his old familiar sneers.

"I—don't know—that was papa's own business—if he did not mind, why should we?" said Amelia, with a toss of her pretty head.

"But suppose I had something to say which could make it quite sure that Edmund's will was of no good, Miss Stenhouse?" said the vindictive lover—"suppose I knew of a creditor who could empty this pretty house, and all your purses, and leave you nothing—what then would you have to say to me?"

The beautiful Amelia stood dumb for a moment, looking at him—trembling for her

problematical co-heiresship—trembling lest she might have to forswear Sir John, and no longer dream of being called "my lady"—trembling most of all before the fiery eyes fixed upon her with so intent a gaze. "What should I say?" said the troubled flirt, with a little gasp—"why, that you were bound to make up for it somehow, you cruel creature—you who were to be so very rich, too;" and Amelia escaped, scared, when he chose to permit her—making up her mind to do anything in the world rather than marry this violent lover; while he went downstairs, roused by these last words into a renewed frenzy of excitement, carrying the Kenlisle paper in his hand.

The paper, which perhaps brought him news of his *success*, and that the vast unsunned hoards of his old progenitor were already his; the paper which he dared not read, for fear of attracting notice, in the dim cowardice of guilt, till he had shut himself up in his own room. But there was nothing in it; not a syllable in it about Marchmain or any sudden death. Had they both perished

—both master and servant, in that lonely house on the moor? Or did the recluse of Marchmain live a charmed life?

CHAPTER XIX.

Two days after, the same party met again in Mrs. Stenhouse's drawing-room. Horace had eluded all attempts on the part of Roger and Sir John to see or have any conversation with him; but he could not keep away from that only place where he had a chance of forgetting himself, or, at least, of counterbalancing one passion with another. He could not explain to himself why he stayed in Harliflax. It was against all his interests; it was trifling with Mr. Pouncet; it was exposing himself to a hundred risks, and leaving the citadel of the business to which he had bound himself undefended. But Horace cared no longer for Mr. Pouncet's credit, or for his own income. The young man was desperate: he was ready at

any moment, in pure recklessness, to have flung that secret at anybody's head whom it had a chance of harming, or rendering unhappy, though, with a characteristic sullen obstinacy, he kept it out of reach of those whom it might have served. Nor could he any longer discern, out of the fiery mists which blurred his future, any prospects of his own; he could not make any definite stand upon that visionary thousand pounds a-year which he had extorted from Mr. Pouncet; he could not think, in that lurid haze out of which everything around him rose indistinct, like a phantom, of such a certain and settled act as marriage, with a household and steady beginning of life in its train. No such thing was practicable to the unhappy young man. He might have found some wild solace in breaking through the bounds of decorous life, and persuading Amelia Stenhouse to elope with him; but, except that, nothing tempted his fascinated mind. He could only sit and wait for the explosion—the terrible intelligence which, sooner or later, must come to him from Marchmain.

But he was once more in Mrs. Stenhouse's drawing-room, where there was no longer any newspaper to excite him out of his senses—calmly seated among people who were pursuing the common way of life, without any stronger stimulant than a flirtation or common project of marriage among them. Sir John, whose indolence was no match for the obstinacy of Horace, was carrying on, as well as he could, the talk with Amelia, which the entrance of "that cub" had interrupted; while Amelia herself did her best to subdue the tone of that exceedingly interesting consultation, in acknowledgment of the presence of her too ardent lover. Somehow, Horace's entrance, and all the restrained passion, unintelligible to them, which he carried about him, made the whole party uneasy. Amelia remembered with terror that, if provoked, he knew of somebody who could turn them out of doors, and leave them penniless. Mrs. Stenhouse regarded him with a vague awe, as holding in his hands at once her husband's good name and the well-being of her son; while Musgrave, with a good deal of natural

exasperation, sat in the same room with the man who was in the secret of some conspiracy against himself, yet showed no compunction towards him, and who had tried to blacken his youthful character to his dearest friends. Nobody pretended that he was welcome in that house—not even timid Mrs. Stenhouse nor Amelia; yet he went—secure in his power; —went and set himself by Amelia's elbow, turning his passionate looks upon her, while, from one cause and another, nobody dared venture to say to him how little welcome he was.

That day, however, destroyed the strange incubus to which his presence had grown. The post came in while Horace sat in Mrs. Stenhouse's drawing-room. Roger had some letters, and opened them without waiting to be alone. When he had glanced over one he turned doubtfully, yet with some eagerness, towards the visitor. "Mr. Scarsdale," he said, quietly, "Colonel Sutherland is at Marchmain."

Horace did not fall down, or cry out, as he might have done; but, in the extremity of his

startled horror, he rose bolt upright, and stood with his face blanched out of all natural colour. He could not speak, it was evident, for a minute; then he said, with a strange blank voice out of his throat, "My father is dead!"

"No, not dead—not so bad as that—but ill, I confess," said Roger, kindly, quite melted by what seemed to him an overflowing of natural feeling; "only ill; don't look so alarmed—not even seriously or alarmingly ill, so far as Colonel Sutherland says. Pray, read the letter yourself."

Horace took the letter mechanically, and sat down again, holding it up before his face. He could not see the writing, which swam and floated in variable lines before him. He had enough to do to control himself, that nobody might see the wild tremor, exultation, horror, which possessed him. And yet what did it mean?—not dead, but ill! His potion surely must have done better work. Not dead, only ill? The words came to his very lips unaware. What did it mean?

"Take some wine, Mr. Scarsdale; you look

quite ill. Nay, nay, perhaps it isn't anything to be anxious about," said Mrs. Stenhouse, stealing round the table with the charitable cordial to Horace's elbow. "How you did comfort me, to be sure, the other night about Edmund!—and that came true. Drink this to give you back your colour, and don't take on so; I hope your father will be spared to so good a son!"

"What do you mean?" cried Horace, hoarsely; "do you mean to taunt me?—as good a son as he was a father! Thank you, thank you! I was startled. I'm going off for Marchmain; good-bye."

He crushed up the letter in his hand, and went away hurriedly; but almost before they had begun to wonder and talk about him, came back and thrust his head in at the door.

"Musgrave," said Horace, in a broken voice, "when I come back, if—if I come back—I'll tell you something to your benefit. I say it freely, without any man asking me—I promise you I will."

With this mysterious intimation he disappeared once more, going out from among

them upon his dismal way, leaving a strange suggestion of evil in everybody's mind. Great misery, it was clear enough, was in this sudden intimation. Was it the agonized apprehension of love fearing death?—what was it?—for of all the unlikely things in the world, that little company could have guessed at anything sooner than the truth.

"But I believe he expects to come into a great deal of money when his father dies," said Amelia; "not a common fortune—such a deal! I daresay that was why he looked so strange when he went away."

"And, oh, how do *you* know, Amelia?" asked her next sister.

"I wish you would not ask ridiculous questions," said Amelia, casting down her eyes with a pretty look of embarrassment, and a blush and simper, intended for the benefit of the baronet. "I know, of course, because—because Mr. Scarsdale told me; how else could I know?"

And Sir John Armitage saw, as clearly as if she had described it, a presumptuous proposal on the part of "that cub," backed up

by promises of fortune, which the beautiful Amelia's delicate mind had remained totally unmoved to hear of; and entirely subdued by her fascinations, the bewitched baronet made up his own mind summarily. He flattered himself there was not much fear of rejection; and how famously that beautiful figure, which bent so often, and with such winning grace, towards him, would brighten the great rooms of Armitage Park.

Thus the waters closed in placid circles, widening out into smiles of well-pleased fortune, around the spot where Horace Scarsdale disappeared; and one of the great stakes he had played his deadly play for, slid out of his reach into the polished hands of a quiet spectator, who staked nothing. But he did not know that; he thought of nothing—not even of Amelia—as he rushed along to the railway, and flew by that iron road, at the swiftest pace, to the nearest neighbouring town he could reach in the vicinity of Lanwoth Moor; he was beyond thinking in the extremity of his haste and desperation. The black wings were spread over the lonely house.

Death, whom he had invoked, was coming—his fortune would soon be all his own; but there was never spectator at a tragedy who held his breath for its consummation as Horace Scarsdale did, rushing out of his own black, unrepentant remorse and misery to Marchmain.

CHAPTER XX.

How that dark interval of time had passed at Marchmain no one could tell—for Peggy, the only individual who could have known, had long ceased to speculate on her master's sentiments and feelings, and learned to content herself with things as they came. But just as Colonel Sutherland, in single-minded devotion to the interests of his young friend Roger, and an honest and simple desire to set right the harm which he supposed to have been done by his nephew, had drawn close in his circles of laborious but unprofitable investigation to Lanwoth Moor, Peggy's attention had been called to her master's bodily condition. He had spent an agitated and restless night, as she could hear by his motions in his own

room, and, for the first time in twenty years, did not get up in the morning. When Peggy went to him, alarmed by this extraordinary occurrence, she found him in bed, paralysed in one side, unable to speak, his face somewhat distorted, and everything helpless about him except his eyes. It was evidently and beyond any doubt "a stroke," and poor Peggy, alone in her solitude, and not knowing what to do—afraid to leave him to seek assistance, and unable to ascertain what were his own wishes — put the disordered room tidy by instinct in the first place, until she was driven out of it, scared and breathless, by those eyes which followed her movements everywhere. "Like as if an evil spirit had ta'en possession," she said to herself, as she went quicker than usual in her fright and perplexity down the stairs; and Peggy described many a day after how it was like an angel of mercy to hear "Mr. Edward, that is now the Cornel, the Lord bless him," knocking at the door all of a sudden, and asking if all was well at Marchmain. "I tould him all was as ill as ill could be; and he never so much as cam

in to rest, but went forth with his staff in his hand five mile of road for the doctor and help," said Peggy; "and ye may all tell me about his own business and other things he had in hand, and owght ye please, but no man shall make me believe, if he preaches till Christmas, that it was aught but the very Lord himsel' in grace and mercy that sent the Cornel that morning, and no other, to the master's door."

That was a busy day for Colonel Sutherland. He sent not only the nearest country doctor, but an express to Kenlisle for a more noted physician there, and sent abundant help to Peggy, and everything which the surgeon could suggest as likely to be of use. The old soldier's heart of pity yearned over the unfortunate man who had shut himself out from all the tender charities of love. He despatched a letter instantly to Susan, bidding her come at once to nurse her father; and when he had done everything that his kind heart could suggest, went back slowly and thoughtfully across the moor, with very sad thoughts in that good heart. Not because he

thought it sad to die; the Colonel had too many waiting for him on the other side of the river to compassionate those who were arriving at that conclusion of trouble; but it was sad to consider the ending of this melancholy and miserable life. Better for himself, for his children, for everybody within his influence, would it have been, if twenty years ago the grave had received him into its harmless quiet, instead of this miserable seclusion. And now, without even that privilege of a conscious pause upon the grave's brink, which sweetens so many memories, and endears so many of the dead, who, living, were less loveable, he was going away, this unhappy man. No wonder the tender heart of the old soldier was sad. It had been better not to be born than thus to die.

When Colonel Sutherland returned to Marchmain he was reluctant to enter the sick-room, fearing that even there the imprisoned mind, debarred of ordinary expression, would chafe at his presence, and put a cruel interpretation upon his kindness; but the importunities of Peggy, the silent sur-

prise of the surgeon, and indeed the forlorn and pitiful loneliness of the patient himself, overpowered his objections. He went in and spoke to the stricken man lying there dumb upon his bed. He detailed all the circumstances of his own arrival, dwelling upon its accidental character—he spoke of Susan, he spoke of Horace—for the doctor had declared that to restore his speech and faculties it would be well to rouse him, even to passion; but all without effect. Mr. Scarsdale lay in his dressing-gown among the bedclothes, in that dead silence which looked almost malicious, and of purpose, contrasted with the wild watchfulness of his eyes. One hand lay powerless and numb beside him; the other held with a tight grasp some folds of the white coverlid. There he lay stretched out motionless, attempting no notice of the remedies they applied to him, suffering himself to be moved and shifted about like a log, but following every movement, every gleam of light, every passing shadow, with those eyes so desperately alive and awake. When he had once entered that

melancholy sick-room, the Colonel for very pity could not leave it. He sat down by the side of the bed, his whole heart moved with a compassion unspeakable. He could not bear to think that no kindred blood or familiar voice was near the unhappy sufferer. Peggy, it was true, went and came; but Peggy was afraid of her master, whom she had served so long and faithfully. She was superstitious, with her long solitude and broken spirit; she thought her master had already gone to his account, and that it was some malignant spirit which looked out of these wild waking eyes.

After two days of this hopeless lethargy, during which Colonel Sutherland never left his post, but watched night and day, dozing sometimes for an hour in the arm-chair by the bedside, Susan arrived, under charge of Patchey, to whom the thoughtful Colonel had written. It was a strange home-coming for Susan, in the midst of all her sweet new hopes and beginning thrills of life. But when Susan, instead of being taken into Peggy's motherly arms, and kissed, and blessed, and

cried over, as she expected, felt Peggy, after her first scream of welcome, bear heavily upon her shoulder, and drop off into a dead faint of exhaustion and over-excitement, she saw at once this was no time to think of herself. When Peggy was better, she took off her travelling dress, and went up without a moment's delay to her father's room, where Uncle Edward sat, pale with watching. Susan, too, was shocked and frightened more than she dared say by the sick man's attentive eyes; but she took the nurse's place with a natural and instinctive readiness, and begged her uncle to go away and get some rest. Why should they watch him with such careful, tender anxiety—the banished daughter and the insulted friend? Why, in this dismal need of his did these two come, whom he had sent away from him, and come as though that imprisoned spirit which they watched had been a heart of love? But nobody could tell in this world whether such thoughts touched the heart of the recluse, as he lay unmoving, unsleeping, speechless, upon that dreadful bed. The days which

had now passed since he took any nourishment, the unnatural state in which he lay, made his condition, unhopeful enough at first, entirely hopeless now. He was dying slowly, no one knowing how it went with him in the depths of his hidden soul, and no one able to interpret if any late compunctions, any meltings of the shut-up heart, or touches of human charity, were shining at length, at last, when all utterance was over, out of these wakeful eyes.

When Susan took her uncle's place for the next long night — when through all the silent hours she could not move without attracting these sleepless looks, which were all that remained of this man's will and mind —Susan got frightened in spite of herself. So alive, so waking, so desperately conscious were these eyes, that the poor girl fell down on her knees by the bedside, and implored her father to speak to her.

"Only speak, say anything, if it was to curse me!" said poor Susan. It was impossible to believe that he could not if he would. And then one gleam of expression different from

their usual strain of watchfulness appeared in Mr. Scarsdale's eyes; a strange gleam, as if tears were in them; a momentary melting of the hard heart, a wandering movement of the unparalyzed hand to lay it on her head. Susan hid her face, weeping aloud, the touch going to her heart as never tender father's blessing went, and her whole young soul heaving within her, at the thought how little she had loved him, he who relented over her and blessed her thus under the stony hand of death. Never in all his hard life had so sweet a gush of human gratitude followed any act of Mr. Scarsdale. It was well for him that it was his last.

CHAPTER XXI.

At that moment when Susan, full of tenderness and compunction, knelt by her father's bedside, and Mr. Scarsdale's hand still trembled upon her hair—token, all too late, of the love which might have been—the door of the room opened stealthily for a moment, and Horace looked in. Whether it was that Mr. Scarsdale had preserved the sense of hearing as distinctly as he seemed to do that of sight, or that a strange magic of hostility drew his eyes to that quarter, it is impossible to say; but when Horace's gaze fell upon the bed and its ghastly inhabitant, his father's eyes met his, with a look which all the world and all its pleasures could never efface from the young man's mind. He staggered back, startled out

of all self-control, and uttering, in spite of himself, a cry, half of defiance, half of horror; while the unhappy father of these two children, thrusting, with the force of extremity, Susan's fair head away from him, swayed round, by a desperate impulse, his half-lifeless body, and turned his face to the wall. Startled out of her filial delusion, and with her faculties confused by the sudden thrust away, which was given with feverish force, Susan stumbled to her feet in sudden terror. Horace was standing ghastly pale by the door, his bloodless lips apart, his eyes dilated, his manner so frightfully excited and unnatural, that Susan's first impulse was to interpose the frail protection of her own body between the helpless father and the frantic son. As she stood alarmed, protecting the bed, Horace gave a ghastly sneer at her, and said, "Too late!" hoarsely out of his throat. He saw well enough that she was afraid of him, and meant to defend her father; but nothing in the world could have initiated Susan into the horrible meaning of that "too late." When she thought of it, she supposed her brother to

mean too late to be recognized, to ask his father's pardon—perhaps to gain his father's blessing, as she had done; and with that idea her feeling changed.

"Not too late, Horace," said poor Susan—"he is sensible—he knows *me*. But oh! before you speak to him, call Peggy first, and bid her tell the doctor. The doctor said he was to be called whenever papa moved."

"The doctor! What doctor?—what does he want with a doctor?" said Horace, in his hoarse, dreadful voice.

"The doctor is in the house—Uncle Edward would not let him go away. He *has* moved—he has all but spoken! Oh! call the doctor, Horace!" cried Susan, eagerly; "perhaps it may be a sign for the better! Call Peggy—she will tell you where he is!"

But Horace stood still on the threshold of the fatal room, looking round with wild, investigating eyes, as anxious, as desperate, as the sufferer's own. Where was it?—where was that little medicine-chest, which had dealt a slower death than he expected, but which, if it were found, might snatch the cup from

his own lips, and abridge his lifelong punishment? Where was it? The dying man upon that bed, dreadful as was his son's curiosity about him, and terrible as the shock had been when their eyes met, was less important now than that chest and its tell-tale contents. He gazed around with his wild eyes—so like his father's—looking at everything but his father, who lay motionless, his dread eyes closed now, and his face turned towards the wall. Susan, in wild impatience, stamped her foot upon the floor, hoping by that means to attract somebody. There was a stir below, as of some one who heard her; and Horace, roused by the sound, approached the bedside cautiously. "He is dead!" her brother whispered in Susan's ears. It was the middle of the night, dark and still; and the poor girl, standing here between the dying man—who, perhaps, had died in that dreadful moment—and the living man, who looked like a maniac, lost all her self-command. She cried aloud in the extremity of her fear and anguish. Was Horace *mad?* And in that miserable moment, with his rebel son returned

to vex his soul, had her father passed away?

The stamping of Susan's foot on the floor, the sound of some commotion in the sick-room, and at last her voice calling out in uncontrollable terror, brought all the other inmates of the house to the room—Peggy, the doctor half awake, the nurse, and Uncle Edward, all of whom, at Susan's earnest instance, had lain down to seek an hour's sleep. Among all these anxious people Horace looked still more like a spectre—but after another moment spent in inquisitive inspection of the room, he turned to the doctor and overpowered him with questions. As if in braggadocio and daring exhibition of his want of feeling, he urged the surgeon into descriptions of the complaint: what it was—and how it came on—and what were its particular features. While the astonished doctor replied as shortly as possible, and turned his back upon the heartless questioner, Horace hovered more and more closely about his father's bed. Another fit produced by the sudden appearance of his son had almost completed the mortal work which was going on in the ema-

ciated frame of the recluse. It did not matter to anybody now that those eyes were faintly open, which a little while ago were full of unspeakable things; the force and the life had ebbed out of those windows of the soul, and the patient no longer knew anything of the agitated consultations going on over him, or of the hideous curiosity with which his son thrust into those, asking questions which horrified the hearers. When the doctor said that there were complications in this case, which made it difficult to treat, the young man laughed a short, hoarse, horrible laugh, and asked "how long do you think he will last?" in a tone which made them shudder. They were all afraid of his haggard figure as it swayed to and fro about the bed.

"You've been drinking, sir," said the doctor, in authoritative disgust. "You can't do any good here—be quiet and go to bed. He distresses the patient; some of you take him away."

"Mr. Horry, come with me," said Peggy, laying her hand upon his shoulder. He followed her out of the room without saying

anything. He *was* mad, crazed, intoxicated; but with a deadlier poison than was ever distilled from corn or vine!

The old woman took him into his own room and left him there. She shook her head at him in sad displeasure, but understood nothing of the tragic misery which made him mad.

"I bid ye not to grieve," she said, reproachfully. "The Lord knows he's been little of a father to you, that you should break your heart for him; but be dacent, Mr. Horry, be dacent; if it's no for love's sake, as is no possible, yet have respect to death."

When Peggy left him Horace buried his haggard face in those hands which had grown thin and sharp like the claws of a bird of prey. "Have respect to death!"—to the death which he had invoked—to the destruction he had made. He sank down prostrate upon the floor, and lay there in a heap, helpless, overcome by the horror of what he had done The strength of an army could not have kept him from Marchmain at that terrible crisis and climax of his fate; but now

when he was here, he could but lie prostrate in the wildest hopeless misery, or, mad with his guilt, peer like a ghoul about his father's death-bed. It was easier to do that, noting horribly every slow step of the approaching presence, than it was to lie here in the dismal creeping silence, with that footstep creaking on the stair, and chilling the night, and a hundred deadly sprites of vengeance shouting Murder! murder! all night long, into his miserable ear.

CHAPTER XXII.

BEFORE that night was over the terrible visitor whom Horace believed his own act to have brought to Marchmain entered the lonely house; but the unhappy parricide did not hear or see the entrance of that last messenger. While his father sank gradually into the longer and surer quietude, sleep, feverish and painful, fell upon the son. He had not slept for many nights, and his great excitement, added to the fatigue of his journey, had completely exhausted his frame. The confused and painful commotion in the adjoining apartment as the mortal moment approached; the sobs of Susan, who saw Death for the first time, and found the sight of those last agonies intolerable and beyond

her strength; the solemn bustle afterwards, when the last offices had to be performed—were all insufficient to awake Horace out of the deep but unquiet slumber, over which phantoms and fever brooded. He lay as Peggy had left him, in his travel-soiled and disordered dress, fatigued, haggard, bearing such weariness and exhaustion in his face, that it would have taken harder hearts than those of his sister and uncle to close themselves against him. But Horace was as unconscious of the visit of Susan and Uncle Edward as of any other incident of the night. They stood over him as he slept, talking in whispers; but those soothing voices did not enter into the fever of his dream. Susan was crying quietly, every word she spoke producing a fresh overflow of tears—natural tears, which she could not help shedding, but soon must wipe away. Nothing less was possible to her tender heart, and it would have been strange if the end of that unloving and unlovely life had produced anything more.

"He looks so tired—poor Horace! Oh! Uncle Edward, he is not so hard-hearted as

people thought!—he will feel *this* very much; think how troubled he looked last night," said Susan.

"Yes, Susan," said Uncle Edward, with a sigh, "more than troubled; but I do not blame him; it was not his fault—the evil was done before he was born."

"What evil, uncle?" asked Susan, looking up with wonder through her tears.

"My poor child, it would but horrify you," said Uncle Edward. "I cannot think but Horace, somehow or other, has found it out. Your brother lying there, Susan, is now one of the richest men in England; your grandfather's will passed over your poor father, and left everything to Horace. Ah, Susan! nothing but passion, and misery, and black revenge on one side and the other; and look at this young heir—poor Horace! they have heaped up money for him, but they have already robbed him of all the bloom and promise of his life."

"You don't think he has done anything very wrong, Uncle Edward?" said Susan, trembling and crying more and more.

For looking down upon that face, all darkly pale in its sleeping passion, with its deep-drawn lines of pain and stealthy curves about the closed eyes, it was hard to think of misery inflicted by other people. Misery self-made, and guilt actual and personal, lay even in the sleep of Horace Scarsdale's face. Susan's mind did not take in or comprehend that statement about her grandfather and his wealth, and "one of the richest men in England." The words had no meaning to her at that melancholy moment. She thought only of the brother of her childhood in that heavy sleep of exhaustion and misery, thrown down in a heap like one who had not even heart enough to stretch himself out in common comfort; and her heart yearned over him, whatever he might have done.

"I think, perhaps," said the Colonel, with hesitation, "that the journey and the excitement, and, perhaps, taking something he was not used to, overcame him last night. Sleep is the best thing for him; let us leave him quiet—he will be better when he wakes."

And so they left him; Colonel Sutherland

really believing that to brave himself for a scene which must excite him painfully, but where real grief was not to be expected from him, Horace had come intoxicated to his father's death-bed, and Susan half-disgusted, half-comforted to believe that his maniac looks of last night might be attributed to such a cause. They went away, the Colonel to take an hour's sleep after his long visit, and Susan to weep out her heart, thinking over that one touch of natural sympathy, which, beyond death and the grave, gave her more hold of love upon her father, than she had ever before felt herself to possess. The morning was kindling over the moor, brightening the golden-blossomed gorse, and glowing over the purple beds of heather; but the blinds were drawn down and the shutters closed in March-main; the obscure and gloomy atmosphere of death reigned in the house. Peggy sat by the kitchen-fire, with her white apron thrown over her head—her mind lost in long trains of recollection, sometimes her wearied frame yielding to a half-hour's sleep, sometimes her troubled thoughts overflowing in a few natural

tears. The woman who had come to be nurse and household assistant dozed on the other side of the fire. Colonel Sutherland, very grave, and full of the thoughts which death brings in his train, sat alone in the darkened dining-room, taking an hour's sleep as he said—though in reality the old soldier had only read his morning chapter in his old Bible, and was composing himself with the tender strength of these words of God; while Susan, withdrawn in her own room, gave the dead man his dues, and paid that duty of nature, a woman's lamentations, to the concluded life.

In this languor and stillness of the death-consecrated house, where no agony of living grief reigned, but only the natural pathos and the natural rest, Horace awoke at bright mid-day from his unnatural sleep. Accustomed to the noises of a town, and to the perpetual wasting of his own burning thoughts, the stillness struck him strangely, with a chill calm which he could not explain. He sat up mechanically, and put the lank disordered hair from his face, trying to recollect where he was and what had happened. Looking round at that room, strange

yet familiar, the shelter of all his youthful years, he could almost have supposed that everything else was but a hideous dream, and that he himself was nothing worse or guiltier than the rebellious lad who once slept and dreamt within these homely walls. But then bit by bit the light brightened upon him; he traced out the whole black history line by line; the first suggestion of this guilt at which he had shuddered—the returning thoughts which grew familiar to him—the deed itself, black and breathless in its stealthy and secret crime; and now the consummation had come! At that thought he started from his bed, all his pulses beating with the strength of fear. What was he thinking of?—the great stakes he had played for and won? the big inaccessible fortune which made him this day, in this obscure house, as Uncle Edward said, one of the richest men in England? the wealthy inheritance, which was all his own? He thought of no such thing, poor madman, in his frightful success and triumph; far from that ruined soul and miserable house were now the delusions of love and fortune which had wiled him

into crime; no exultant thought of fortune gained—no lover's fancy of Amelia won, warmed him in the first sharp access of misery. He thought of one thing, and one only, in the abject horror of that guilt, which he himself knew, though no one else did. The fatal box in which he had laid his train of destruction—the medicine chest where his father had gone to seek healing and had found death. Where was it? He saw it in his burning imagination a far more dread obstacle than had been that life which he had destroyed, standing between him and all the objects of his ambition; he could not look anywhere but that fatal vision glided before him, clear with its brass-bound corners, its tiny phials, and the lock which closed with such a horrible jar. It haunted his miserable eyes, a guilty spectrum—where was it?—had the doctor perhaps taken possession of it already to detect the secret felon, lurking murderous under its seeming innocence?—had the vindictive victim of that snare given it over into some one's hand, a witness not to be intimidated against the parricide? The heavy drops rained from his white face, his limbs

trembled like palsy, his very youth and strength forsook him in that dread emergency. By a dark intuition he knew that his father was dead, that all was over; that, so far as superficial appearances went, the fortune and the triumph were his own; and so got up—God help him! —in a fever of hopeless misery, to look for that fatal token which might, his excited fancy supposed, turn all the tide against him, and take his very life. He went out trembling and feeble, out of the shelter of his room —afraid of the daylight, of the stillness, of everything about and around him—trembling, like a felon as he was, at his own dreary and hideous success. This was how Horace Scarsdale came into his fortune, in faithful fulfilment of his grandfather's wicked will!

CHAPTER XXIII.

ARMED by the extremity of his alarm, Horace ventured, no one being near to spy upon him, to enter, in his miserable search, the chamber of death itself. He dared not look towards the bed, on which lay that rigid outline of humanity, all covered and dressed with white. He could scarcely contain the horror of his trembling as he stood, dismayed and powerless, in the presence of his victim; but, after his first pause of involuntary homage, he turned—though still not daring to turn his back to the bed, overpowered with a terror which he could not explain—to pursue his search. Stealthily moving about, with his head bent, and his step shuffling as if with

age, he examined every corner, peering into the wardrobe, where his heart thrilled desperately to see the well-remembered garments which it was so hard to believe could never be worn again; and turning over familiar articles of daily use with awed and trembling fingers, as though they could betray him; but he could not find any trace of the object of his search. Its very absence seemed to him significant and terrible. Had some enemy taken it to testify against him? Had the dead man himself taken measures to secure his own revenge? Heavy, cold, clammy beads of moisture hung upon the young man's face; a chill as of death entered into his heart; deep to the very centre of his being he himself knew and felt his own guilt—and now another mysterious, gnawing misery was added to his own self-consciousness. Some one else knew also; some one meaning him evil had withdrawn that dreadful instrument of death and vengeance. He had played his horrible game, but the great stakes were further off than ever. Already, in his miserable,

excited imagination, he saw, instead of fortune and Amelia, a trial and a scaffold, and the dread name of parricide. A wild agony of impatience and intolerable suffering came over him. Rather than wait till this slow, deadly avenger of blood had found him out, he would rush forth somewhere, and denounce himself, and have it over. His punishment was more than he could bear!

But all was silent in the death-stricken house; not a sound, save the loud ticking of the clock downstairs, and the deep throbs of his own heart, could Horace hear as he stood, stealthy and desperate, at the door of his father's room. Susan's face, innocent and wondering; Uncle Edward's benign countenance, disapproving and sad; and, still more dangerous, Peggy's troubled eyes, watching where he went and what he did, haunted his imagination. He could fancy them all grouped together under covert somewhere, watching that guilty, stealthy pause of his—watching his secret, clandestine footsteps as he stole downstairs. But still he did go down, in the

breathless cowardice of his conscious crime; fearing everything, yet with all his mind fixed, in an intensity which was half insane, upon that dumb witness against him. He did not expect to find it. He could have supposed it possessed by some malicious spirit, and with an actual animate will working against him; but he could not rest till he had, through every corner, sought it out—if, perhaps, it could be found.

When he had got downstairs he paused again to consider where he should go; a faint sound of Peggy's voice in the kitchen, and the slight stir made now and then for a moment by Colonel Sutherland in the dining parlour, confused and stopped him in his course. He stood for a moment irresolute and breathless, not seeing what to do, and then almost involuntarily opened the closed door of Mr. Scarsdale's study. The recluse was dead, and could harm no man now; but he was alive when his guilty son stepped into that room so deeply instinct with his presence, where now more than ever he lived and had his sure abode. Almost more awful than the

actual presence of the dead was that presence unseen and terrible, the invisible life of life, which death could not touch, and which should remain here for ever. Horace dared scarcely breathe the air of this deserted room. An hour's imprisonment in it, in his present state of mind, would have driven him into mad superstition, if not to positive frenzy; but he saw something there, set out almost with ostentation on the table, which would have drawn him through fire and water. There it stood, solemnly by itself, the books and papers cleared away from its immediate vicinity, in malign and mischievous state, calling the attention of everyone who entered. Horace made his shuddering way forward, and seized upon it with the grasp of desperation. Yes, there it was, with all its evidence within his own reach, and safe, if he willed it so, to harm him no more!

The little medicine-chest was partially open, with the key in its lock; but this had been done of purpose, and was the result of no accident; and within lay something white —a sheet of paper—which assuredly was

not there when he had opened it before. Almost too anxious to pay any attention to these elaborate marks of intention and design, Horace seized the box and the phial which he had filled. He could not pause even to look whether the leather which covered the cork had been removed, or any of the contents were gone, but hastened to the fireplace, where the ashes of a fire still lay in the grate, and with trembling hands broke the neck of the bottle against the grate, and emptied out its contents—for he dared not go outside, lest some one should see him. As he paused, kneeling on the hearth, breathless and with a beating heart, he tried to take comfort and re-assure himself. It was gone; no evidence existed now that the son had entered in, murderous and secret, to the father's chamber. He tried to persuade himself that he breathed more freely; then he grovelled down upon the hearth, and hid his face in his hands. God help him! what did it matter though no one else suspected?—deep in the bottom of his heart did not he *know?*—and was there anything in heaven or earth which

could wash the horror of that certainty out of Horace Scarsdale's miserable mind? He had been selfish, malicious, unloving before; but never till now had he been a *murderer*—and, oh! the horrible difference, the change unspeakable, which that dread distinction made!

However, he got up at last, all shuddering and weak, with the remains of the phial grasped in his hand, and with a morbid curiosity returned again to examine the box. This time he set it open and took out the sheet of paper. He could scarcely distinguish the words at first, for the awe of looking at his father's writing, and receiving thus, as it were, a direct message from the dead; but when the sense slowly broke upon him the effect was like a stroke of magic. He stood staring at the paper, his eyes starting from his head, his face flushing and paling with wild vicissitudes of colour; then he dropped down heavily on the floor, thrusting aside unconsciously Mr. Scarsdale's chair, which stood in its usual place by the table. He could neither cry nor help himself; he fell

heavily, like a man stunned by a sudden blow—voice, strength, consciousness went out of him; he lay prostrate, with his head upon the fleecy lambskin where his father's feet had been accustomed to rest, no longer a self-defending, self-torturing, conscious parricide, with a brand upon his soul worse than that of Cain; a figure blind and helpless, an insensible, inanimate mass of dull flesh and blood, conscious of nothing in the world, not even that he lived and was a man.

The paper fell fluttering after him and covered his face. It was of the kind and colour which Mr. Scarsdale always used—a blue flimsy leaf, and had been carefully cut to fit the box in which it was placed. What had tempted the recluse to record thus his suspicions and his precaution, no one in the world could now ever tell; save as the expression of a vindictive sentiment, and secret triumph to himself in his solitude for discovering and baffling a secret enemy, there was no meaning in it, and the chances are that nothing would have brought these words from the unhappy father's pen could he have known

the overpowering transport of relief which at sight of them should overthrow all the strength and make useless the defences of the still more unhappy son. On the paper were written in large letters, in Mr. Scarsdale's distinctest handwriting, the following words—

"Tampered with by some person to me unknown, and the contents of this chest left untouched by me since the 3rd May, on which day I have reason to believe this was done."

This was the date of Horace's fatal visit to Marchmain; and the solemn statement of the dead man relieving him from the actual guilt with which he believed himself accursed, had overpowered him with an emotion beyond words—beyond thought. Enough was left to sting him all his life long with black suggestions of ineffaceable remorse, but so far as act and deed went, he was not guilty. He could say nothing in his unspeakable relief. The desperate tension of his misery had kept him alive and conscious by very consequence of its sufferings—but when the bow was unstrung it yielded instantly. There he lay senseless where his father's feet had used to rest,

smitten to the heart with an undeserved and unutterable consolation—guilty, yet not guilty, by some strange interposition of God. He could not even be thankful in this overpowering, unbelievable relief from his misery; he could only fall fainting, unconscious, rapt beyond all sense and feeling. He was deeply, miserably guilty; too deeply stained ever to be clear of that remembrance in this life; but he was not a parricide. In spite of himself he was saved from that horror, and human hope might be possible to him still.

CHAPTER XXIV.

"And so the Cornel's at Marchmain; it's like you're acquaint with all the history of that family, Patchey, my lad—tak up your glass; ould comrades like you and me are no in the way of meeting every day, and you've a long road and a lone across the moor."

So said Sergeant Kennedy, possessed with a virtuous curiosity to learn all that could be learned from "the Cornel's own man," who, with the instinct peculiar to his class, had speedily found out that good ale and company were to be had at the "Tillington Arms," where Mrs. Gilsland showed great respect and honour to the important Patchey. Patchey had already taken glasses enough to increase

his dignity and solemn demeanour. He had grown slow and big of speech, and eloquent on the great importance of his own services to the Colonel.

"He's a wise man for other folk," said Patchey deliberately, "but a child, and nothing but a child, where his own affairs is concerned. If it werena for me that ken the world, and keep a strict eye upon the house, he would be ruined, mum; ye may take my word for it—ten times in the year."

"Acquaint with all the family?—I'm no a braggart," said Patchey, in answer to this question; "but it stands to natur that in the coorse of our colloquies upon affairs in general the Cornel says many a thing to me."

"Not a doubt about it—especially," said the Sergeant, gravely, "as you're well known to be a discreet lad, and wan that's to be trusted—as was known of ye since ever ye entered the regiment, though I say it. Ye see, mistress, he was always a weel-respected man."

"The Cornel, as I was saying," continued Patchey, passing loftily over this

compliment, "says many a thing to me that it would ill become me to say over again; but this ye a' ken as well as me. The gentleman at Marchmain was married upon the Cornel's sister, and died of a stroke, and the visitation of God, the day afore yesterday; and a' the great fortune that's been lying gathering this mony a year has come to his son."

"Eyeh, Mr. Patchey! but the fortin'—that's just the thing I cannot make owght of, head nor tail," cried Mrs. Gilsland; "there was never no signs, as ever I heard tell on, of fortin' at Marchmain, and for a screw and ould skinflint, that would give nowght but the lowest for whatever she wanted, I'll engage there's no the marrow of Peggy from Kenlisle to Cardale; and if you had asked me, I could have vowed with my last breath that the family had seen better days, and were as poor as ever a family pretending to be gentry could be."

At this statement, which he took to be derogatory to his dignity, Patchey squared his spare shoulders, and erected his head.

"Being near relations of my ain family," said Patchey, "where persons have oucht to say agin the family at Marchmain, I would rather, of the twa, that it was not said to me."

"Agin the family!" cried Mrs. Gilsland—"havers! wasn't Mr. Horry at my house five nights in the week, and the Cornel himsel' brought Miss here to dine? Do you mean to tell me its agin a family to say it's seen better days? Eyeh! wae is me! to think there's no a soul in the Grange but ould Sally, and the young Squire out upon the world to seek his fortin' like any other man! but where's the man would dare to say I thought the less o' Mr. Roger? That's no my disposition, Mr. Patchey. It may be the way o' the world, but it isn't mine."

"Leftenant Musgrave, if it's him you're meaning, he'll do weel, mum," said Patchey, with solemnity; "he's been visiting at our house, and the Cornel's tooken him up. I would not say but more folk nor the Cornel had a kindness for that lad; but these affairs

are awfu' delicate. I wadna say a word for my life."

"Eyeh, man! I'll lay a shilling it's Miss!" cried Mrs. Gilsland, in great excitement and triumph.

"But all this has little to do with the family at Marchmain," said Sergeant Kennedy, as Patchey shook his head with mysterious importance—"what's the rights o' that story if wan might ask, Patchey, my friend? —for it's little likely the Cornel would keep a grand family secret like that from a confidential man like you."

"Ye're right there, Sergeant; he'll say more to me, will our Cornel, than to ony other living man, were it Mr. Ned or Mr. Tom, that are but callants," said Patchey. "I ken mair nor most folk of a' our ain concerns; but it's as good as a play to hear this. I've made it out, a sma' bit at a time, mysel'; and if it werena that the gentleman's dead, ye might hew me down into little bits, before ye would get anything that wasna wanted to be heard, out of me. But he's gane, poor gentleman, and a' the better for

him, as I've little doubt; and Mr. Horry, as ye call him, has come into a great fortune. Ye see the rights of it was this:—the auld man of a', the grandfather, had been a captious auld sinner, though I say it that should not; and being displeased ae way or anither at his son; this ane that's now dead, he made a will, strick cutting him off, and leaving the haill inheritance at his death to *his* son, a baby in his nurse's arms. That's just the short and the long of it. I've read sichlike in print; but it's no often ye meet wi' a devil's invention like that in living life. And the Cornel's sister's husband, ye see, he took it savage, being but a young man then; and the poor lady died, and down came he here, with an ill heart at a' the world—and the rest ye ken as weel as me."

"Eyeh, man, is that the tale?" said Mrs. Gilsland. "I wouldn't say but it was dead hard upon Mr. Horry's papaw; but, dear life! was the man crazed that he would take it out on his childer?—for more neglected things than them two, begging your pardon, Mr. Patchey, were not in this countryside; and

how they've comed up to be as they are is just one of the miracles of Providence. Neyther a play nor a lesson like other folks's childer, nor a soul to see them frae year's end to year's end. It was common talk; that's the way I know; but, eyeh, Mr. Patchey! had the very Cornel himsel' no thought for them poor childer there?"

"The Colonel was at his duty, mum," said Patchey. "He was resident at Rum Chunder station, and me with him; and he served in the Burmah war, and wherever bullets were flying, as the Sergeant can tell you. There was little time to think of our own bairns, let alone ither people's, in these days. The Colonel was in Indeea, and in het wark, and me with him, for nigh upon forty year."

"Hot work, ye may well say, Patchey, my friend," said the Sergeant, authoritatively. "It's little they know, them easy foulks at home, what the like of huz souldiers goes through. Eat when you can and sleep when you can, but work and fight awlways: them's the orders of life as was upon you and me."

"Eyeh, Sergeant!" cried Mrs. Gilsland,

suddenly facing round upon the self-betrayed veteran, "was them the words you said to my Sam, when the lad was 'ticed away and 'listed all out of your flatteries?—or to the young Squire, when he hearkened to you? Eyeh, ye deceitful ould man! Is't a parcel o' stories, and nowght else, ye tell to the poor young lads, that knaw no better? and make poor mouths, and take pity on the sodgherin', when ye're awl by yoursel'?"

"Whisht, mistress, whisht!" said the Sergeant, who had recovered during this speech from his momentary dismay. "Did I say owght but what's come true? Sam Gilsland's been home on furlough, Patchey—as pretty a lad as ever handled a gun—corporal, and well spoken on; and the young Squire's leftenant, and mentioned in the papers—and what could friend or relation, if it was an onreasonable woman, wish for more?"

"Ye may make your mind easy, mum, about Leftenant Musgrave; and your son, if he's steady, will come well on in the Rifles—'speeial when the Cornel's tooken him up," said Patchey. "Our Cornel, he's that kind of

a man when he takes an interest in a lad he's not one that forgets. I should say he would do uncommon well if he's steady, being come of responsible folk, and the Cornel for a friend."

"The Lord be thankit, I have little reason to complain!" said Sam's mother, wiping her eyes with her apron; "and it's a rael handsome uniform, though it's no so gaudy as your redcoats. I took my Sam for an officer and a grand gentleman when he came in at the door, before I saw his honest face," cried the good woman, with a sob of pride; "and the Cornel's good word is as good as a fortin', and he's uncommon kind is the young Squire. I wish them all comfort and prosperity now and evermore," she concluded, with a little solemn curtsey, giving emphasis to her good wishes—"and Miss and Mr. Horry, as well; though he's no more like the Cornel than you or me."

"He takes after the faither's family—he's no like none of our folk," said Patchey; "but, though I wouldna say the Cornel altogether approves of him, he's much concerned about

the young gentleman the noo. He's showed great feeling after a', that young man; he was like a lad out of his mind when the faither was ill; and the day of the death, what does the Cornel find but Maister Horace dead on his face, fainted off in the study, and in a high fever ever since. The like of that, ye ken, shows feeling in a young man."

"Feeling? They were none such good friends in life, if awl tales be true," said Mrs. Gilsland. "My man, John, was all but put to the door when he went for Mr. Horry's things; and a lad like him, that was never greatly knawn for a loving heart, and was coming into a fortin' besides—feeling here or feeling there, I don't see no occasion for Mr. Horry fainting away."

"Nor me," said the Sergeant, emphatically; "but I ever said, and I'll ever say, that though he's the Cornel's nevvy, and doubtless well connected, and good blood on wan side of the house, I'll ever say yon's an inscrutable lad."

"That may be," said the solemn Patchey; "but scrutable or no, he's in a brain fever, and

craves guid guiding, and here's me come for the medicine, if I hadna fallen in with ower guid company. Weel, weel—an hour mair or less will do the lad nae harm. I've little faith in physic for such like disorders. If ye've a good constitution and a clear conscience, and the help of Providence, ye'll fight through: if ye havena, ye must e'en drop out of the ranks, and anither man'll take your place. But I have Mr. Horace's bottle in my pocket a' this time; so, with your leave, I'll bid you good day."

Saying which, Patchey stalked out of the "Tillington Arms," and took his solemn way across the moor. His step was slow, and his cogitations momentous. If he did not think much about Horace and his medicine, he settled sundry knotty points in philosophy as he wended through the fragrant heather. Patchey's gravity and intense sense of decorum increased habitually with every glass he emptied; but, perhaps, when his moralities flourished most, he made least haste about his immediate business, and it is to be feared that the confidential communication which the

Colonel made to him when he reached the house was not of a flattering character. Horace got his physic an hour or two later than the proper time; but Patchey's flowers of eloquence blossomed no more that day in the kitchen of Marchmain.

CHAPTER XXV.

It was not till weeks after the mortal remains of his father had been laid to their final rest that Horace, out of his fever and frenzy, came to himself. Long before that time the popular opinion had changed concerning Marchmain and its inhabitants. The straggling country neighbourhood, with its little knots of villages, and solitary great houses, had eschewed for years that gaunt house on the moor; but, from the day on which the old soldier and the weeping girl stood alone together beside that grave—Susan, overpowered with a natural grief, which sprang more from her position as a daughter and a woman than from direct personal anguish, which could not

exist in her case, weeping her tender natural tears, full of filial compunction and pity, on that quiet bed, where the unquiet man had at last found rest; while Colonel Sutherland stood by gravely mournful, his noble old face clouded with compassion and sorrow, not for the death, but for the life that found its conclusion there—the mind of the countryside had changed. The group was one which those who saw it could not forget; and it began to be remembered, in the great houses near, that Mr. Scarsdale, on his arrival, had been thought worthy of a visit, and that the name of the gallant old Colonel was not unknown to fame. Then, when already the matrons near began to take pity upon Susan's lonely orphanage, and the dangerous illness of her brother, rumours, of which nobody could trace the origin, began to spread of the family history, and the great, unbelievable fortune which Mr. Scarsdale's death had put into the hands of his son. The story was tragical enough, and had shades sufficiently dark to bear dilution and variation. Then Roger Musgrave appeared in haste upon the scene, bringing his mother

with him to his desolate old Grange—his mother, and little Edmund, and, of necessity, a train of servants. After a little they were followed—some hasty furnishing having in the meantime been done at Roger's ancient house—by the beautiful Amelia and her sisters. Amelia proclaimed herself most anxious to see and comfort Susan, her brother Roger's bride—but perhaps had a little curiosity besides to see with her own eyes what were the substantial attractions of Armitage Park. Edmund was not going to die, and Amelia had but little chance of being an heiress; so the beauty thought it might probably be as well, before Horace Scarsdale got better of his fever, to arrange matters with Sir John.

All these changes came about while Horace lay senseless in the wild turmoil of his fever, or, struggling with delirium and incipient madness, fought for his life. Susan had already received various matronly visits of condolence and sympathy; various young ladies unknown to her before had declared themselves ready to swear eternal friendship with the solitary

girl; and many a flattering report of the wealth and importance of Horace, such as would have been balm to his soul a few months ago, had been spread through the county; while Horace lay all unconscious of the fortune which had after all come to his hands unstained by actual bloodshed. When he did come to himself at last it was a warm midsummer day, the blazing sun of which made vain efforts to penetrate into his darkened room; and that room was full of the luxuries of sickness—those luxuries which only the most close and affectionate care provides. In the wonder and weakness of his sudden awaking, he lay motionless for a time looking round him, unable to connect what he saw with any portion of his former life. Long experience and close observation of his nephew had convinced Colonel Sutherland that some great mental shock was the occasion of his sudden illness, and the tender-hearted old man, forgetting when he watched by Horace's bedside everything save that he was his sister's son, had caused every piece of furniture which could

be changed in the room to be taken away, and replaced the familiar objects with safe unknown articles, which could recall no painful associations to his patient's mind. He was seated there himself grave and anxious, for this awakening was the crisis of the fever, and Uncle Edward had persuaded even Susan to leave him alone by his nephew's side. The Colonel's heart was heavy as he sat gravely pondering over the young man's face; it was no "feeling" which had driven Horace desperate when his father died; and the grieved watcher, himself so nobly innocent and unsuspicious, could not but fear some miserable connection between the young man's agony and that vindictive inscription in the medicine chest. He was afraid that Horace might say something to betray himself, or to convey some similar doubt to the mind of his sister, to vex Susan in her quietness; so he would have no one there with him to watch that awaking, but sat by the bedside grieved, anxious, and alone.

When Horace's wandering, feeble glance fell upon his uncle, a great cloud and shadow

came over him even in the calm of his weakness. Everything came back to him in that first glimpse of Uncle Edward's face. He shut his eyes tightly again, with a longing to return to his insensibility, and gave a groan out of the depths of his miserable heart. He was cured—his fever was over: he had come back to life, with its agonies worse than fever. The very sound of that groan gave signal of recovery to the watcher by his side.

"You must keep quiet, Horace; you are better: you will soon be well, if you take care. And here is something you are to take," said the Colonel. "Hush! compose yourself, you live; and God is in heaven, and all will be well!"

But Horace did not answer; he kept his eyes shut for another bitter moment, gathering up the threads of his scattered recollections. Then the last incident of all returned to him—he was innocent!—so he said to himself, with a natural human casuistry; innocent! though it was in spite of himself. Innocent! at least, not guilty by the actual event. Then he opened his eyes and took the medi-

cine, which his uncle had poured out for him. He was the same Horace as of old—subdued, but not changed; and in the sudden recollection that he was not a parricide, a rush of his old self-assertion returned to his awakening mind, and of his old sullen look to his face. But he did not say anything for the moment—he sunk back again upon his pillows, weak to extremity; almost the only sign of life in him being that uneasy guiltiness in his heart, which even the discovery, which had released him from the weight of murder, could only salve, and could not cure.

But he was uneasy, too, with the Colonel's grave, grieved, conscious face beside him—he could not help saying something. He remembered so distinctly now the study and all its familiar objects, the medicine-chest standing on the table; somebody must have brought him from that place where he lost consciousness, to this where he regained it. "Uncle, who found me?" he said, shutting his eyes once more, unable to bear that grieved look of knowledge which was in the Colonel's eyes.

"*I* found you, Horace," said Colonel Sutherland, quietly; "let your mind be quite at rest, no one else came near us. I put away the little medicine-chest," he continued, with hesitation, "and the paper which dropped out of it. They are locked up in one of your drawers; no one has either seen or touched them but myself."

Then there was a long, conscious pause; neither the sick man nor the watcher spoke—the one contending with his natural sullen pride, which would confess no sin, and the horror within him of knowing that so far as intention and purpose went he was as guilty as any actual murderer; the other grieved, silent, afraid, anxious *not* to hear that some diabolical purpose had been nursed in that young head, yet sadly fearing that, whether confessed or not, the wickedness had been there.

"Uncle," said Horace, at last, the words bursting from his lips in an eager paroxysm of defence against himself, and vindication to his own conscience—"Uncle, *I* did him no harm."

"I am very thankful to hear it, Horace," said the Colonel, very gravely; then he made another pause—"unless it will relieve your mind tell me no more," he said, quickly—"only, Horace, remember, you have been very near the grave; perhaps you know yourself that you have been near something more terrible than the grave; you should pause and think now while you can; for every evil intention, as well as for every act of sin, there is pardon with God, for Jesus' sake."

He said it simply, but with a solemn, almost judicial gravity. He could not help guessing what had been going on in the troubled spirit beside him, of which he knew so little; he could not help shuddering at the thought of the horrible guilt from which, by accident, as it appeared, and interposition of God, the young man had been unwittingly preserved. God help him!—so young, so wretched, to drag the hideous burden of that remembrance through all his days of life! The deepest pity, even amid his horror, struck the old soldier's noble, innocent heart. He could not compre-

hend the guilt—but he felt the remorse, with a compassion that was half divine.

Horace made no reply—he shrank, in spite of himself, as though he would have crept away morally out of his uncle's presence; for the instant the young man realized, with a desperate force of conviction, the "gulf fixed" between heaven and hell which none can pass over; he felt it in his guilt a thousand times more deeply than the pure heart beside him did, in its tender depths of pity. He lay still in his weakness, with a mortified consciousness of humiliation and inferiority, insufferable to his arrogant spirit. Then it occurred to him that there was still one thing, by which he might drag himself up fictitiously to that higher elevation, which he recognized vaguely in his downfall, and envied, though he knew it not. He turned once more towards the watcher by his bed with a sudden movement, which was so quick as to give him pain.

"You think very badly of me," he said, hastily; "but I have got something to tell you — something to tell Roger Musgrave, which will remedy one evil at least, and

change, more than you can suppose, his position in the world."

The Colonel waved his hand, with the action of a man who knows what another is about to say. "My dear boy," he said, compassionately, "I am grieved that you cannot have the satisfaction of doing, at least, this piece of justice—but you are too late. The Kenlisle attorney, hearing of your connection with Musgrave, and of some promise you had made him when you heard of your father's illness, sent to beg an interview with Roger and Sir John, and confessed the whole transaction. That matter has been arranged while you have been ill."

"Do you mean Pouncet?—Pouncet has consented to his own ruin?" cried Horace, with a pang of disappointment. He had still been reckoning on this as a moral compensation which it would always be in his power to make, to balance more or less his personal guilt.

"Not to his ruin—they have made terms," said the Colonel. "He restores the property, and pays something to Roger besides, and

there will be no prosecution or exposure. He loses Armitage's confidence, of course, and is no longer his man of business; but he preserves his character, and eases his conscience. All that is arranged. My dear Horace, you are extremely weak: try to compose yourself, and forget these troublesome affairs. If you can, for your health's sake, endeavour to sleep."

Horace turned his face sullenly towards the wall, and said no more. Perhaps this sharp pang of unexpected mortification and disappointment eased him of his heavier load. He set his teeth as he turned away and relieved himself from the sight of Uncle Edward's compassionate and kind face: everything humiliated him in that self-importance which was so strong a power within him. He once had it in his power to be at least Roger Musgrave's magnanimous deliverer, and to expose the fraud which had left the youth penniless; but he had lost his opportunity, and even that moral make-up for his other grievous guilt had slid away from him. He lay here powerless, known to one man, at least, in all the black-

ness of his evil intention, and to more than one man, stood revealed and visible, a willing accomplice in a fraud, left in the lurch by the principal sinner. His disappointment—his failure—the humiliation of his guilt—sickened him to the heart; he closed his eyes upon the light, disgusted and miserable. He had his reward!

CHAPTER XXVI.

"AND so, hinny, you're to be married, and set up in a house of your own; and, 'stead o' solitude, and a wild moor, and ould Peggy, have all the county wishing ye joy. Eh, weel! I'm an ould fool, and nowght else: I think upon the mistress, and I canna forbear. The bride goes forth with joy and blessing, but the Lord alone He knows what will come to pass thereupon."

And Peggy, who was standing in the old dining-room—that room so strangely thrilled through, warmed, and brightened with the new life—examining one after another the pretty things which already began to be prepared for Susan's marriage, suddenly sunk

down on a chair by the table, and covered her face, and sobbed aloud.

"But, Peggy, you should have a cheerful word for me," said Susan—"we have had so much trouble. Things will never happen with me as they did with mamma. For, Peggy," added the bride, with her honest eyes smiling frank and sure out of the warm blush that rose over her face, "we will trust and help each other through every trouble. Trouble never can be very heavy when there are two of us to bear the load."

"The Lord knows, and He alone," said the faithful servant of the house. "I'm ould, and my heart trembles; the like of me cannot see, Miss Susan. I look upon the bride-white, and there's shadows o' shrouds and widow's mourning a' covered ower and hidden in the bonnie folds. The Lord preserve ye from all ill and trouble that is beyond the strength of man!—and grant to me to depart and be at rest, before ever cloud or shadow comes upon the light o' my ould eyes!"

Susan was not discouraged in her own undiscourageable hope and happiness even by

these melancholy words; but she was grieved for Peggy, who, broken and nervous with her long solitude, was no longer like herself. She came round to the old woman's side, and put her young arms, which had clung there so often, round Peggy's neck.

"Do you know Horace is going to give me a fortune, Peggy?" said Susan. "Horace is different, don't you think, since he has been ill? I thought it would have turned his head to be so rich—but he does not seem to care; he is so much quieter, older than he used to be. I did not suppose he would have felt so much for poor papa."

Peggy said nothing—but she gave an emphatic shake of her head, and, diverted into a less pathetic channel of thought, dried her eyes. Peggy's sentiments were changed. It was the younger generation who were now in the ascendant, and Peggy's magnanimous instincts, falling to the weaker side, turned all her sympathy towards the dead.

"But he is changed, though you shake your head," said Susan; "and I am to have a fortune—me! Everything is Uncle Ed-

ward's doing. How I wondered when he brought me these India muslins, Peggy—do you remember? I thought you were all crazy when you spoke of *me* wearing them—and now look here; and I suppose," said Susan, with womanful satisfaction and vanity, "we shall see the best people in the county at the Grange."

"And only your right, too," said Peggy, by way of interjection; for Susan, having fully launched herself, was quite qualified to keep up the discourse.

"Especially when Amelia Stenhouse marries Sir John. I wonder how she can marry that odd old man; and so pretty as she is too—don't you think she is very, *very* pretty, Peggy?"

"'Handsome is as handsome does,'" said Susan's oracle, with great solemnity.

"Oh, to be sure; but one likes to be handsome all the same," said Susan. "I don't say I *like* Amelia out-and-out. I suppose she's too grand and too accomplished, and too clever, and that sort of thing, for me; but she's very nice to look at, Peggy; and when she marries Sir John——".

"When who marries Sir John?" asked Horace, abruptly. He had just come rather feebly into the room—convalescent, but not strong; his mind working out all the vigour which should have gone to the strengthening of his body. That he was changed was certain, but it was doubtful whether the change was so entirely for the better as his sister charitably supposed. He did not look much more amiable at the present moment; he came in with the sullen shade of old upon his face. He had heard part of Susan's last words; but she did not know what a furious passion awoke in his heart when he asked, "Who marries Sir John?"

"Oh, it is Amelia, Horace — Amelia, Roger's half sister; did not you know about it?" said Susan, innocently — "you, too, who have known them longer than I; it was settled last week."

"Oh, was it?" said Horace, bitterly. He went out of the room the next moment, flinging down, half unawares, half consciously, a heap of his sister's wedding preparations. It was natural that the sight of such things

at such a time should gall the young man; the next moment they heard him up in his own room, making a great commotion there. Susan was a little startled and frightened in spite of herself. Horace took strange fancies now and then. He was rich now, and could do as he pleased. Sometimes Susan, all unaware of the canker there, imagined that his mind was a little affected. She could not imagine what freak possessed him now.

A little while after Horace came downstairs, dressed more carefully than she had yet seen him. He told her he was going away "to town"—which Susan supposed to mean to Kenlisle — and should walk to the nearest roadside public-house, where they kept a gig. He would send for his things, but might not see her for some time again, and so he held out a hot, trembling hand, and bade her "Good-bye—good-bye!" Susan tried some remonstrances, but he hurried out in the midst of them, and strode away across the moor in the bright August sunshine. His sister stood at the window watching him, as she had stood many a day before, till his figure disappeared

among the distant saplings and dark gorse bushes. It was the last time that Horace Scarsdale trod the familiar heather of Lanwoth Moor.

That evening Roger's mother came with him when he came on his daily visit to his affianced bride. They knew she was alone, and guessed she must be anxious. Horace had been at the Grange, where he saw only Amelia, and went away again in half-an-hour, leaving even that stout-hearted beauty, who was not too sensitive, fainting and overpowered by the violence of his farewell. That was the last any of the party saw of Horace for many a year. The marriages took place in due time, and all went well with the new households; but the unhappy heir of the Scarsdales went out and was lost in the world, and its great waves concealed him and his pleasures and wretchedness. He had put himself out of the reach of common blessings and sorrows, the dews and sunshine, of God's every-day world. He had his fortune, his failure, his dead burden of guilt, to begin his life withal; and so carried out

among men, and the bustle and commotion of the world, a second bitter chapter of that hereditary curse, which had made a recluse and wretched misanthrope of his father, and a dismal prison and place of bondage of the solitary house upon the moor.

THE END.

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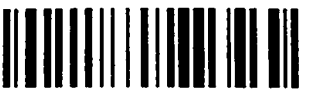
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